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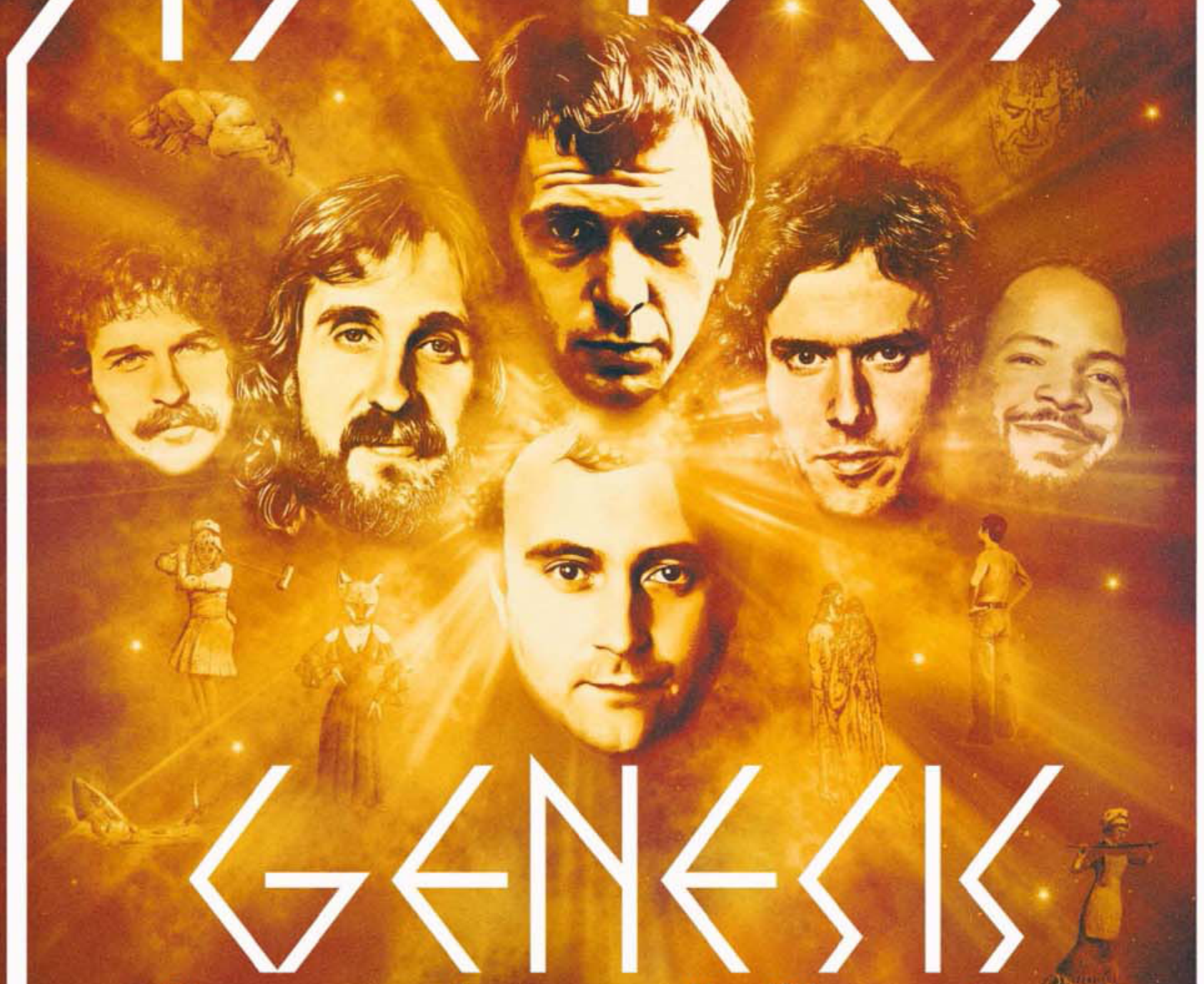

GENESIS

40 years ago dreams really did come true!
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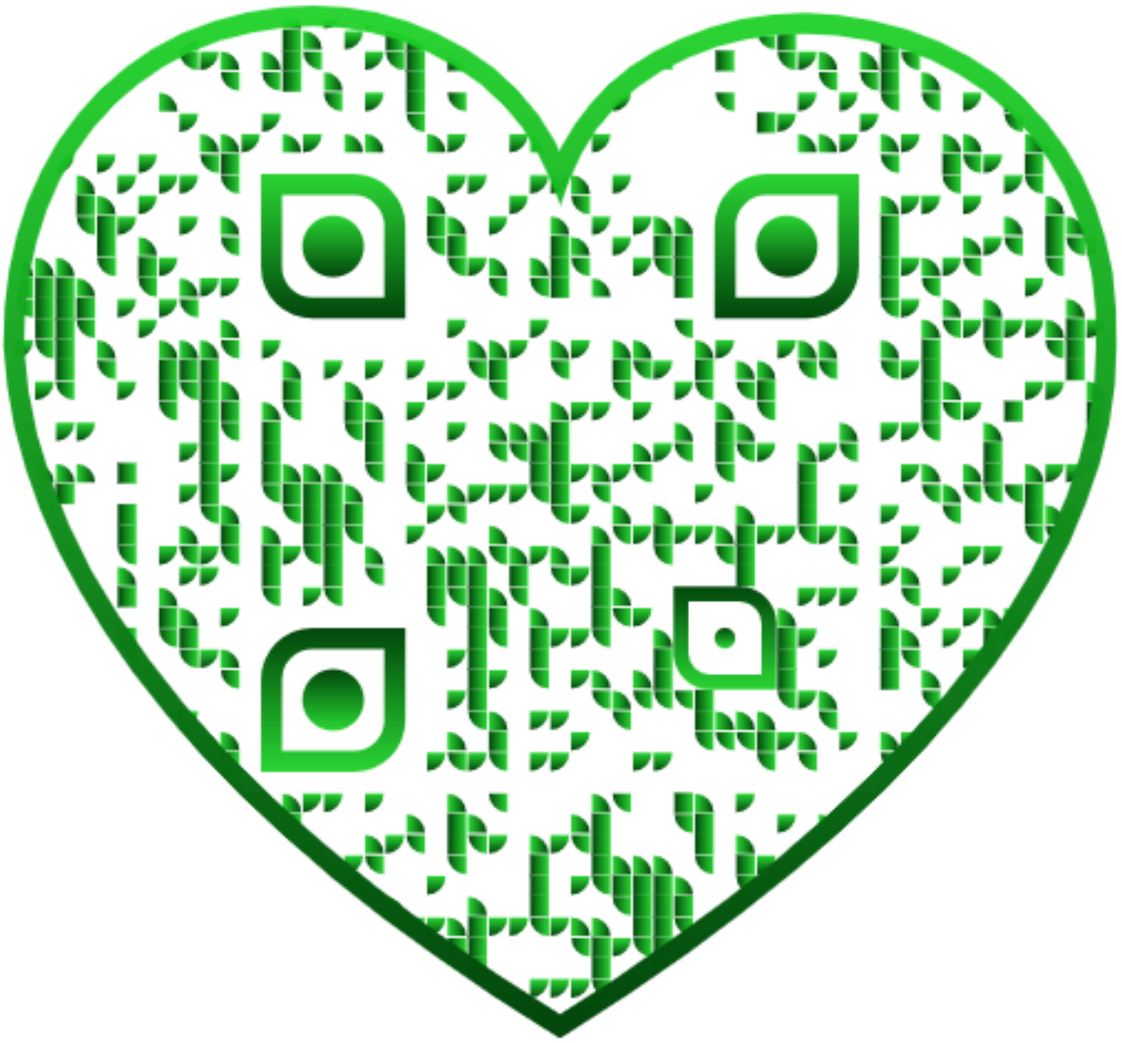
FUTURE

PROG 134

MARILLION
The story behind Holidays In Eden

VAN DER GRAAF
Hugh Banton on life in the veteran prog rockers

PORCUPINE TREE
The new reunion tour caught live in the USA



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ISSUE 134 21.10.22

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IF IT'S IN THERE IT'S ON HERE

PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

COVER FEATURE

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The inside story of the reunion everyone wants. But it only happened once!

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Dark prog/neofolk trio Heilung are back with more mysterious musings on the historically inspired *Drif*.

DEVIN TOWNSEND
PRESENTS
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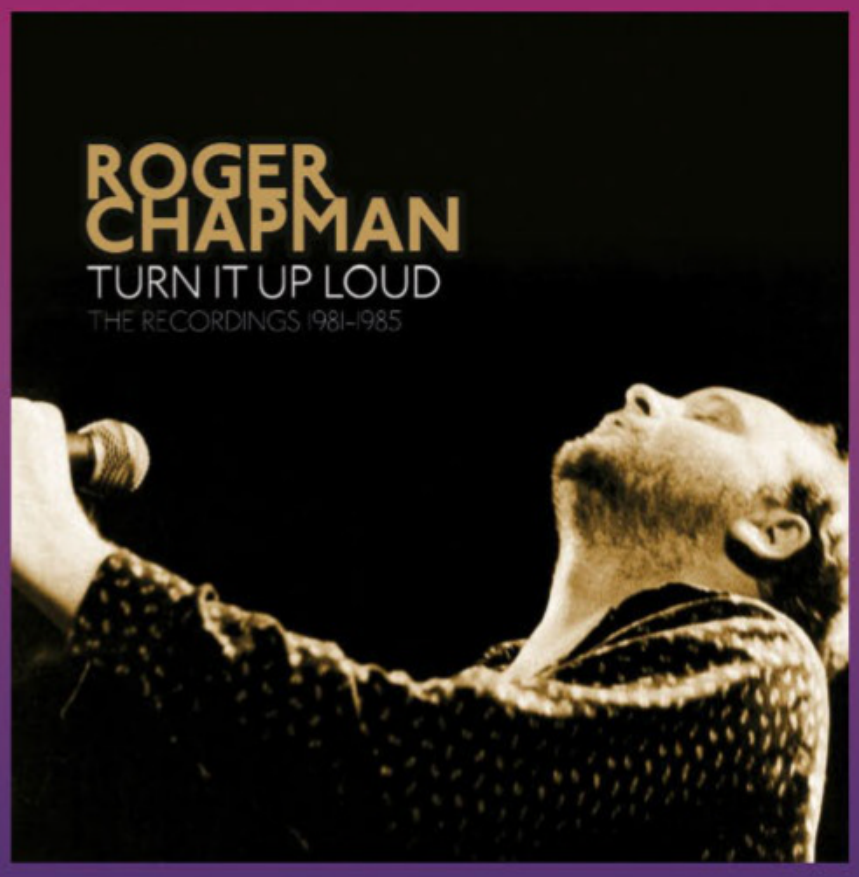

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- New remastered release of the classic solo album by Julie Driscoll.
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'THE SPACE BETWEEN – THE RECORDINGS 1969-1970'
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- New remastered 3CD clamshell boxed set featuring all the recordings by progressive rock band Hard Meat.
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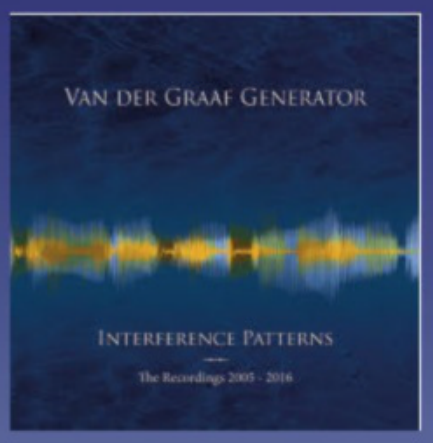
- With an illustrated booklet featuring an essay and interviews.



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PROG PRESENTS...

Discovering

White Knight

White Knight Records is a collaboration between Rob Reed (Magenta/Tigermoth Records) and Will Mackie (Hoggwash/Caerllysi Music), two friends with a long-standing mutual interest in the promotion and popularity of prog and art-rock. Mackie and Reed have taken their friendship one step further by implementing their collective knowledge in manufacturing, promotion and music/video production, as well as using their experiences to mentor both up-and-coming and established artists. They have an experienced backup team at their disposal to ensure the smooth running of the many services they provide.

Having experienced the heavy-handed dealings of record companies from both sides, the pair are determined to offer a much more open-book policy with the artist, sharing with them the modern-day financial realism surrounding the music business. They work closely with all of White Knight's artists to nurture their talents, which ensures a finished product of the highest standard. Even their financial agreements are heavily weighted in the artists' favour; a total contrast to the more traditional arrangements offered by many other labels. White Knight's policy is openness at all times.

Scan here to download or follow the instructions on the right

What's on your free White Knight digital album

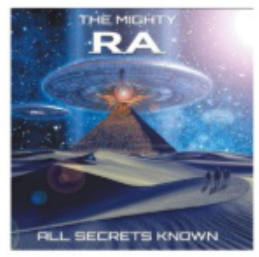
Download the 17-track sampler from www.bit.ly/white_knight_sampler

1 Tiger Moth Tales
Spring Fever
Taken from *A Song Of Spring*

2 Kite Parade
Letting Go
Taken from *The Way Home*

3 Red Bazar
State Of Disgrace
Taken from *Inverted Reality*

4 Last Flight To Pluto
Stay Out Of My Head
Taken from *Random Karma, Fate And Destiny*



5 The Mighty Ra
Nothing Comes Too Easy
Taken from *All Secrets Known*

6 Salva
Discovery
Taken from *Ghost Story*

7 Mobius
Spider
Taken from *Make The Promise*

8 25 Yard Screamer
Pages
Taken from *Natural Satellite*

9 Alan Reed
Kingdom Of The Blind
Taken from *First In A Field Of One*

10 Steve Thorne
In The Frame
Taken from *Island Of The Imbeciles*

11 Altavia
So Far So Good
Taken from *Kreosote*

12 The CSides Project
Engine Down
Taken from *Purple Hearts Corner*

13 Peter Gee
Rock'n'Roll
Taken from *Paris*

14 Kinky Wizzards
Caffeine Overdose
Taken from *Quirky Musings*

15 Life In Digital
Karma (edit)
Taken from *Signs To The Far Side*

16 Eden Shadow
The Stars Unfold
Taken from *Phases*

17 The Kentish Spires
Horsa From Beyond The Grave
Taken from *Sprezzatura*

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4. Enjoy your new music!

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Ed's Letter

Spotify

Stream the Prog 134 playlist at www.spoti.fi/3fIdy3I

Hello, and welcome to the new issue of *Prog* magazine. Just over 40 years ago (by the time you read this), some 60,000 Genesis fans convened in an old clay pit in Milton Keynes and witnessed the one live reunion it seems most prog fans have hankered for a repeat of ever since: Genesis with Peter Gabriel. And more importantly, playing (mostly) pre-1975 material too!

On the live stage that's sadly never happened again, and now the band, notably singer and drummer Phil Collins, have laid down their instruments for a final time as Genesis, it never will. So this issue we celebrate that legendary, one-off live spectacle that went by the name of Six Of The Best (seven, by the time Steve Hackett appeared for the encores). Reading Daryl Easlea's fascinating delve into how it happened and what went down on the day, while everyone remembers the torrential rain, no one's memories seem to have been dampened by the downpour (see what I did there?). You can read our cover story on p28.

As well as Genesis we've got the story of Marillion's 1991 album *Holidays In Eden*; Hugh Banton, the quiet man of prog, opens up on his life in Van der Graaf Generator; and we celebrate new releases from King's X, Arena, Threshold, Cosmograf, AA Williams, Heilung and loads more...

I'd also like to acknowledge the passing of Spike Worsley, who sadly died just after we sent the last issue to the printers. Spike was one of the most popular members of the prog community, a delight to know and a man of deep integrity; if your band were lucky enough to have had his patronage, you knew you had something very special indeed. Words never quite seem enough at a time like this, but I'd like to think Spike's boundless enthusiasm for music is making wherever he is now a better place, just as he did for so many here on Earth. You will be sadly missed, Spike, and I dedicate this issue to your memory.

We're back on November 25. Until then, take care and prog on!

Jerry Ewing – Editor

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KILIMANJARO PRESENTS

Rick Wakeman's

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A YULETIDE TWIST TO UNIQUE MUSICAL ARRANGEMENTS FROM HIS OWN CAREER AND OTHERS, PUNCTUATED BY HILARIOUS STORIES

November 2022
Thu 24 Croydon Ashcroft Theatre
Sun 27 Dartford Orchard Theatre
Tue 29 Newcastle Tyne Theatre
Wed 30 Liverpool Philharmonic

December 2022
Fri 02 Poole Lighthouse
Sat 03 Bath Forum
Sun 04 Barnstaple Queen's Theatre
Mon 05 Swansea Grand Theatre
Tue 06 Cheltenham Town Hall
Thu 08 Birmingham Town Hall
Sat 10 Cambridge Corn Exchange
Sun 11 Stoke Victoria Hall
Tue 13 York Barbican
Wed 14 Blackburn King George's Hall
Fri 16 Buxton Opera House
Sat 17 Ipswich Corn Exchange
Wed 21 Worthing Assembly Hall

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RICK WAKEMAN

FEBRUARY 2023

WEDNESDAY 22ND
ACT 1: THE SIX WIVES OF HENRY VIII
ACT 2: THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

THURSDAY 23RD
ACT 1: CLASSIC YES
ACT 2: JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

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Bloody Well Write

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BIG BIG HIT

Last night, I finally got to see Big Big Train live. I discovered them a little late and came in just in time for *Common Ground*, but they were well worth the wait. It was hands down one of the most enjoyable gigs I've ever been to and the venue – the Waterside Theatre in nearby Aylesbury – such a convenient location.

I had originally bought tickets nearly two years ago and, when David Longdon's death was announced, thought I would never get to see them live. Although their new singer Alberto Bravin is very different from David, he was excellent and absolutely nailed the set. I was holding back the tears during *Telling The Bees* and the band didn't miss a single note between them. I don't think I've ever clapped so hard in my life. As a special bonus, I even spotted Marillion's Pete Trewavas in the audience! Roll on the next tour – I'll be there!

Phil Whittaker, Princes Risborough

Thanks for your letter, Phil. Now turn to p104 for our review of the show – Dep Ed.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

As a longtime subscriber to the mag, I remember and enjoyed the regular feature that included a list of bands from a selected country. I would love to see a return of this, and especially an article on prog rock bands from New Zealand.

As an expat Kiwi myself, I can confirm that the list will not be extensive and bands such as Split Enz and Dragon will probably get a mention, especially for their earlier works. However, I was recently introduced to a new Kiwi prog band by the name of Pencarrow, and they have really grown on me. Their current album, *Growth In The Absence Of Light* (2020), is an album of absolute beauty and I felt the influence of Pink Floyd, Queensrÿche and Tangerine Dream come to mind. How about an All Around The World feature?

Paul Watson, Ireland

TURNING AWAY

I'm a new subscriber to *Prog*, and I am super-disappointed in your adding biased political commentary in your latest issue. I do music to remove myself from that world, and it has no place in a magazine about prog rock.

Michael Long, via email

By its very nature some art will reflect on and react to what's going on around it, even if you don't always agree with the sentiments expressed. Yet surely that's the beauty of art in the first place; the broad diversity of it all, and being open to different ideas and points of view that are expressed? – Ed.

KEVIN NIXON

The adventurous Bill Bruford.

TIME FOR A RETHINK?

Just a note on two different aspects of what is called 'progressive music.' There are two different types of artists, from what I can see. People like Bill Bruford – whose excellent recent box set highlights the breadth of his involvement in music over the years – King Crimson and Peter Hammill, among others, who seem to stay true to their muse and keep exploring, producing adventurous music and *not* endlessly repeating themselves.

The other strain concerns two eternal favourites, who, for me, have become less 'adventurous.' I need to be careful here. Steve Hackett, responsible for some spellbindingly beautiful music in his time

TWEET TALK

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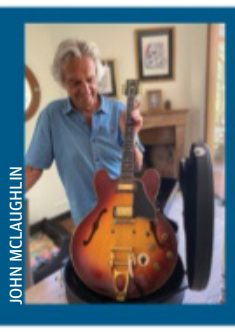
JOHN MCLAUGHLIN
@jmcl_gtr
She is on her way to the museum in Phoenix @MIMphx



JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

DEVIN TOWNSEND
@dvntownsend
Installing carpet tomorrow. Subfloor yesterday. Walls and floors last week. Learned a lot over this process. Bought an 8 foot level and a tool belt. Simultaneously grew 8 chest hairs.

PETE TREWAVAS
@PeteTrewavas
Friars Aylesbury last night and what a night it was. Always apprehensive playing my home gig, but what a lovely audience. Thank you so much for the love and support. Also for supporting @AylesburyFoodb1 You did us proud.

LETTER

The new issue of *Prog* is always a cause for celebration, but I just had to tell you how much I enjoyed issue 133. I loved your *Never For Ever* cover [*Prog* 114] but your designers have done an amazing job with this one and I was really happy to see some of my favourite Kate Bush songs in the accompanying feature. How lucky those of us of a certain age were to have experienced her phenomenal talent first-hand. Thank you for helping me relive my youth.

Kate was never just about the music, she's always paid attention to the full package: her album art, promotional images and videos. What a truly progressive artist and I have some wonderful memories of travelling down to London to catch one of her Before The Dawn shows in 2014. In reading the article, I was reminded that it's been 11 years since her last studio album, *50 Words For Snow*. Here's hoping the recent chart success of *Running Up That Hill* will spur her to create some new music for us all to enjoy.

I also enjoyed your interviews with The Blackheart Orchestra and Jane Weaver, who I saw at Nottingham's Rescue Rooms earlier this year. What a fantastic show! Keep up the excellent work.

Steph Brady, Beeston

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from The Merch Desk at www.themerchdesk.com.

— *Guitar Noir*, *Momentum*, *Midsummer Night's Dream* — has, for me, been churning out over-produced scattershot music since 2015. His last studio album, *Surrender Of Silence*, is the straw [that broke the] camel's back for me. Every track is just a succession of disconnected bits, strung together with little or no coherence. 'Oh, let's add some sitar here, or some Irish pipes, or a church organ here, a three-string oud there', and, to me, it sounds like he's trying too hard to be multicultural and it ends up sounding like it's just for the sake of it. And I've listened to it well over a dozen times, it's not as if I haven't tried.

I'm disappointed because his huge talents as a writer are suffering. Take *Other Side Of The Wall*, from 2017's *The Night Siren*: gorgeous, romantic intro, keening vocals, and then it's gone, and the track dissipates, becomes something else [and] leaves me wondering what happened? My other gripe is that he puts out endless repetitions of the same live material, plays practically the same Genesis songs every year — and who needs another *Seconds Out*? Fine, I don't have to go if I don't want to. Mind you, his live bands have always been fabulous. For me, *Genesis Revisited* from 1996 is the *best* Genesis album ever!

And finally Yes… or no, actually. I'm surprised that at *Prog* you're still singing their live praises when they play everything half-speed and sound ponderous and lifeless. Sure, once they were untouchable, but now they're like a second-rate tribute act. And come on, folks, are you all deaf? Steve Howe was the bee's knees in the 70s, but nowadays he's an embarrassment. His tone is thin and weedy, he's often out of time and his fret work is often inaccurate and sloppy. Has been for decades now… and it's not good enough. I went to the Royal Albert Hall show you reviewed and left early in deep disappointment. I've had all his albums all these years, and if you compare him to most happening guitarists over the last 30 years, he's been left way behind. Doesn't he hear it himself?

So my thought is that *Prog* could be more critical of some clearly 'no longer match-fit' groups or musicians. You can't live on past laurels.

And one final postscript, can you please please please do an article on Shadowfax, a truly original, engaging adventurous outfit. One of a kind indeed.

Barry Smith, via email

***Prog* 133: let's hear it for the magnificent Kate Bush!**

Reader Glenn Lee has found the perfect spot for his Kate Bush poster.

GLENN LEE

A FLYING VISIT

I was in London recently, and picked up a physical copy of *Prog*. It included four postcards. I've seen comments in social media that some of your readers don't appreciate the addition. You can add me to the other side of the ledger. When I'm home, I send my daughters weekly postcards. I also send regular postcards to other family members. It gives them something to look forward to when getting their mail, something other than bills and advertisements. I found the postcards you included to be very useful and appreciated.

When I travel, I send more postcards. When I was in Durham, NC, USA for the ProgDay festival a couple weeks ago, six postcards were mailed to various family members in one day.

Fredrik Coulter, DeLand, USA

PICTURE ON THE WALL!

Many thanks for the wonderful Kate Bush special [*Prog* 133]. We loved the poster so much it has now taken up valuable wall space. Much appreciated.

Glenn Lee, Brierley

CHAD SMITH

CHAD SMITH
@RHCPchad
This is what happens when you play with Rush

GEOFFREY DOWNES
@asiageoff
Last night I had the honour of performing alongside this incredible fellow keyboardist @Jcrudess at the Alan White Tribute concert in Seattle.

GEOFF DOWNES

ROBIN ARMSTRONG
@cosmograf
I'd have loved to have been an actor. Dream job would have been crime solving detective, tearing through the countryside in the Audi like @djhenshall in [TV show] #Shetland.

PROG

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Cover image
Andy Phillips/Getty Images
Image manipulation: **Magictorch**

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

ISSN 2045-2260

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RIVERSIDE HEADLINE PROGNOSIS 2023

The Warsaw band are the first headliners announced for the festival's third year – with the event taking place in both the Netherlands and, for the first time, the UK.

Riverside have been announced as the first of two headline acts for 2023's Prognosis Festival. Swedish prog rockers Soen, Canadian prog metal pioneers Voivod and Colin Edwin's supergroup O.R.k. are also on the bill, with Rosalie Cunningham and Iamthemorning among the other notable additions.

Prognosis was originally launched in the Netherlands in 2019 with Haken, TesseracT as headliners, while the 2022 edition saw Enslaved, Katatonia, Focus and The Fierce And The Dead take to the stages at Eindhoven's 1,500-capacity De Effenaar. Next year's second headliners will be announced very shortly.

The 2023 event will hit both Holland and, for the first time, the UK. The first weekend will take place in Effenaar from April 15-16, with the show then moving to London's Indigo at The O2 the following weekend, April 22-23.

Soen played the inaugural festival in 2019. "Everyone working there was incredibly hospitable," the band tell *Prog*, "and the fans made us feel very welcome. We're looking forward to being a part of it again. A festival that caters to prog metal and prog rock fans is a great thing to see. It's beautiful that prog music is being consumed and supported, and the genre is thriving. It's an awesome community of fans."

Voivod will mark their 40th anniversary next year. "Our set will probably be an overview of our career," drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin tells us, "but we will probably keep it on the prog side. There are prog metal elements in the music of many bands on the bill so I'm sure we'll fit right in. It will definitely be interesting to feel the reaction of both the UK and Dutch crowds, especially if we play the same set."

Some of the more metallic bands on the bill so far are UK hardcore quintet Ithaca, English tech metallers Core Of iO and Belgian heavy proggers Cobra The Impaler.

"We put Cobra The Impaler on last year," says Andy Farrow, the festival's co-organiser and co-owner, "and they actually outsold the headliners on merch. My big thing is finding new bands — we want to keep the bill modern and fresh. Prognosis caters for bands across the 'progressive' genre, whether musically softer or

Riverside will play both the Dutch and English legs of Prognosis festival, in the wake of the release of new album, *ID.Entity*.

"Riverside live has balls - we're defined by our interaction with the audience."

harder. It's about retaining the original audience and developing a new audience for those interested in the progressive scene. 'Progressive' means happening or developing gradually or in stages; 'Prognosis' is a prediction of the future."

Previous festivals have featured educational events such as music industry panels and musician clinics. That aspect is still being looked at, Farrow says, though there are likely to be acoustic events, a VIP area and a marketplace at the 2,000-capacity Indigo. The headliners will remain the same for both venues, but Farrow advised that, for logistical reasons, there may be some variations further down the bill.

"I've been watching this festival closely since its first year," says Iamthemorning's Marjana Semkina, "and I'm very happy we'll get to be part of it this time, especially since Riverside are headlining. One of our latest tours was with them and it'll be lovely to share the stage again."

Prognosis will come at a busy time for Riverside. The Warsaw band will release their eighth LP, *ID.Entity*, through InsideOut on January 20. Frontman Mariusz Duda says that he "wanted to go back to the sound Riverside can achieve when we play live shows. Riverside live has more balls, and what defines us is the interaction between us and the audience: we've always forced people to sing, interact and clap."

All of which bodes well for their planned tours of the US, the UK and mainland Europe, and for their Prognosis sets too.

For the latest updates on the festival and for tickets go to www.prognosis-festival.nl. **GRM**

PRESS/ TOMASZ PULSAKOWSKI

This month, Intro was compiled by

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Alex Lynham
Rhodri Marsden
Matt Mills
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Natasha Scharf
Phil Weller

MAGENTA'S NINTH IS A SYMPHONY!

The Welsh band get orchestral on *The White Witch – A Symphonic Trilogy*.

STUAET WOOD

Magenta are back, with strings attached...

Magenta's ninth studio album will be unveiled on October 31 via Tigermoth Records. Over a year in the making, *The White Witch – A Symphonic Trilogy* is a three-part orchestral suite and, as such, it's a departure for the Welsh band.

"I do so much music for TV," band linchpin Robert Reed tells *Prog*, "that when I had [orchestral] players working on a TV session I got them to play some parts for me too. So it's a mixture of real players and top-of-the-range orchestral samples. It's all orchestrated, with Tina [Booth] singing and Chris [Fry] playing classical guitar. It was a challenge – I've done shorter classical pieces before, but never a 50-minute symphonic work."

Reed drew inspiration from his movie composer heroes John Williams, Hans Zimmer and Ennio Morricone. The album opener, *Sacrifice* is an orchestral reworking of the tune *The White Witch*, from Magenta's 2001 debut LP *Revolutions*, while *Retribution* is based on *Lust*, from their 2004 album *Seven*. Featuring narration from Les Penning and lyrics from regular collaborator, Reed's brother (and fellow horror film fan) Steve, the third piece is *Survival*, a new work that closes the record's story arc.

"It's about how witches once lived among villagers," Reed explains, "healing, and being treated as good people, then witchfinders went around burning them, and *Survival* brings it up to date. The people we see as healers these days are nurses and doctors, especially after Covid."

The band are looking into performing the album live, with full orchestra. For orders go to www.tigermothshop.co.uk. **GRM**

MOUNTAINSCAPE'S ASCENT CONTINUES ON ALBUM TWO

The Reading post-rock trio return with *Atoms Unfurling*.

British post-rock prospects Mountainscape release their second album, *Atoms Unfurling*, on October 21 via Trepanation Recordings. The LP follows the band's full-length 2021 debut *Acceptance*, which established their dynamic blend of ambient, folk, metal and prog rock textures, and earned them a Limelight feature in *Prog* 131, earlier this year.

The Reading-based trio — guitarist Dan Scrivener, drummer James Scrivener and bassist Ethan Bishop — started recording the new album in spring of 2022, and it was tracked at Elm Studios, which Bishop co-runs. The album's title track was released as the lead single back in September, with a video shot by Tom Granica and Drew Vernon, of fellow post-rockers, Tacoma Narrows Bridge Disaster.

Atoms Unfurling is available as a CD, download and also cassette, and while no live dates had been announced as we went to press, latest updates are at www.facebook.com/mountainscapeuk. **MM**

Mountainside: the fuchsia's bright...

PRESS

'BLUESMAN' DUNNERY TO TOUR THE UK!

Tombstone Dunnery and It Bites gigs will show two sides of the revered musician.

Kind of blue: Francis Dunnery.

PRESS/LORRAINE POOLE

Francis Dunnery returns to the UK in November with a new group, Tombstone Dunnery, and he'll also play live in 2023 with Francis Dunnery's It Bites.

Blues-based project Tombstone Dunnery also features bassist Paul Brown, guitarist Quint Starkie and drummer Phil Beaumont. Their eight-date tour begins on November 16 at Carlisle's Old Fire Station and closes at Oswestry's Hermon Arts on November 23, with the band debuting songs from an as-yet-untitled album, due next summer.

"I grew up hearing blues thanks to my older brother," Dunnery tells *Prog*, "but I was obsessed with Genesis at the time. Then I started playing with Robert Plant [in 1993]. Robert knows *everything* about the blues; he was the next stage of my education."

The Tombstone Dunnery idea first emerged in 1990, when Dunnery was living in LA. He envisaged a band with a visual that incorporated a gravestone: "I thought it would say, 'Here lies blah blah, he was a bastard' or something like Spike Milligan's stone, 'I told you I was ill!' One day I was meeting [former Sony exec and AC/DC manager] Steve Barnett and I had a great big hat on and a big black jacket. He looked at me and cried, 'Tombstone!' It was the perfect name for a blues band, which I kept hold of til now."

His inspiration for the material was 1930s blues icon, Robert Johnson: "I thought about the loneliness those guys faced back then, in poverty, the legal system against them. It changed my view. I always played blues in my music, putting an emotional voice to progressive rock, but now I'm completely out of my comfort zone, trying to play with a fucking slide. I can't do it! But I find it exciting."

After the Tombstone Dunnery shows, Francis Dunnery's It Bites will play four UK shows (of "prog, prog and more prog") over January 19 to 22, opening in St Luke's Glasgow, and closing at London's Bush Hall. With a setlist drawing from It Bites' first three albums, Dunnery will be joined by Maschine/Tangent guitarist Luke Machin ("He plays my stuff way better than me!") and Tiger Moth Tales/Camel keyboardist Peter Jones, who's a regular addition to Dunnery's band. "We were the first to give Peter a chance," Dunnery says. "He's brilliant — so musical, and the nicest guy on the planet."

This line-up appears fruitful — an album is proposed for 2024. **JK**

For full dates for both tours and latest updates go to www.francisdunnery.com.

"I always played blues in my music, putting an emotional voice to prog."

INTRO extras

FIELD MUSIC LAUNCH NEW RECORD LABEL

Sunderland art-rockers Field Music have founded their own music label. Daylight Saving Records will open their account with a new album from fellow Tyne And Wear prog-pop artist Ian Black, AKA Slug. *Thy Socialite!* will be released on January 20 next year, preceded by current single *Casual Cruelty*. "This seemed like the perfect start for Daylight Saving Records," says Field Music's David Brewis. "We've always loved what Ian does." More on Slug at www.slugband.co.uk.

Twists and turns: Galahad are back.

PRESS

PROG *ADVENTURERS* GALAHAD RETURN

The British veterans are back with their 11th album, *The Last Great Adventurer*.

Enduring Bournemouth proggers Galahad release their 11th studio album on October 24. Available through the band's Avalon label, *The Last Great Adventurer* is their first release since 2018's *Seas Of Change*. It was produced by Threshold's Karl Groom, and is their first to feature long-term live bassist Mark Spencer as a full-time member.

"This is definitely a Galahad album," vocalist Stuart Nicholson tells *Prog*, "but it's got a few little musical twists and turns to it. The title track finishes very quietly – the idea was to get the atmosphere of a jazz club, with a sax and piano."

That 11-minute epic was inspired by Nicholson's father, who himself had an intrepid streak. The album's cover features an impressive photograph of him scaling Grossglockner, Austria's highest mountain, back in 1958. "Dad was into exploring, and other things too," Nicholson says, "which are all in the song. He's 87 now and not in the best of health. I wanted to write something for him while he's still here."

Other songs on the album include *Alive* ("A tribute to our fans, a thank you to everyone who's followed us over the years"), the two-part prog opus *Omega Lights* and bonus track *Another Life Not Lived*, the last song Nicholson ever wrote with the band's late former bassist, Neil Pepper.

The CD/digital versions of the record will be followed later by black and coloured vinyl editions. For all the latest updates go to the band's website, www.galahadonline.com. **GRM**

HAKEN JOIN BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME IN 'LIMBO'!

The pair will co-headline next year's Island In Limbo tour.

Heavy-hitting Brit proggers Haken will join forces with US prog metallers Between The Buried And Me next year, on an extensive co-headline tour.

With support from New Yorkers Cryptodira, the bands' Island In Limbo tour will see them play 36 dates across Europe and the UK, with the opening show on February 21 in Hamburg, Germany, and closing in Gothenburg, Sweden on April 5. The wide-reaching trip will see them play countries including Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain and Finland. The four UK gigs include a night at London's Shepherds Bush Empire on March 26, which will be Haken's biggest British show to date.

"After three years and two tours cancelled due to the pandemic," says singer Ross Jennings, "our return to the European stage is going to feel very powerful indeed. We are ecstatic to reunited with our dear friends Between The Buried And Me as co-headliners."

For tickets go to www.hakenmusic.com/tour. **GRM**

Haken: out of live limbo.

PRESS/ MAX TAYLOR GRANT

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GORDON GILTRAP ON HIS LATEST *CHAPTER*

The guitar great unveils *Scattered Chapters*, his latest collaboration with Paul Ward.

Gordon Giltrap and Pete Ward. PRESS

Veteran guitarist Gordon Giltrap has teamed up once again with keyboardist Paul Ward for a new album, set for release on November 4 via Psychotron Records.

Scattered Chapters features 16 brand-new instrumental compositions plus fresh recordings of Giltrap's timeless signature hit *Heartsong* and *One For Billie*, which first featured on his 2013 record with Oliver Wakeman, *Ravens & Lullabies*. "What makes this album different to anything else I've ever done is that it's very emotionally charged," Giltrap tells *Prog*.

In 2018 Giltrap lost his son, renowned drum'n'bass DJ Jamie Giltrap, to sepsis at the age of 46. The songs *Through Braden's Door* (Braden being Jamie's child, and Giltrap's grandson) and *The Melody Weaver's Son* were initially written by way of tribute to close friend, conductor/string arranger Del Newman, who himself died in 2020. It was only later that Giltrap realised he was actually channelling his grief for Jamie through that music: "*The Melody Weaver's Son* is a story between a father and son, teacher and pupil, guru and disciple. I'm the melody weaver, Jamie was my son. No one will ever get over the loss of a child," he adds. "You just learn to deal with it, you find ways to cope with it."

Giltrap and Ward's last album together was 2017's *The Last Of England*, and they began *Scattered Chapters* during lockdown. Other contributions come from Irish pipes player John Devine, Giltrap's friend and former presenter of TV show *Magpie* Jenny Hanley (who gives a spoken word performance on *Precious*) and, on the track *Turning Earth*, Marillion drummer Ian Mosley. "Ian's a lovely man," Giltrap asserts. "He started working with me in 1978 on the tour for [album] *Fear Of The Dark*, and we just clicked. He went on to massive things with Marillion, but he's always been in my life. You can't go wrong with Ian Mosley."

Another Giltrap friend collaborator, guitarist and *Harry Potter* soundtrack composer Nicholas Hooper, has written a book, also called *Scattered Chapters*, comprising 18 short stories inspired by the songs on the record, with illustrations and extended artwork. (More at www.bit.ly/scatteredbook.)

There'll be a vinyl edition of the LP next year, with, Giltrap says, a launch gig likely: "It'd be nice to do some of the material from the album with Paul, at a nice venue somewhere." **GRM**

"This album is different to anything I've done - it's very emotionally charged."

Latest updates and more on the album at www.giltrap.co.uk.

INTRO extras

JETHRO TULL ORCHESTRAL ALBUM GETS VINYL REISSUE

On November 18 Warner will reissue *Ian Anderson Plays The Orchestral Jethro Tull* for the first time ever on vinyl. Originally released in 2005 on CD and DVD, the double album features performances recorded during Anderson's tour of the same name across Europe and North America, when he played Tull classics and deep cuts on stage with the Frankfurt Neue Philharmonie. The two-LP set can be pre-ordered at www.bit.ly/tullvinyl

Elder: heavy psych and prog collide on *Innate Passage*. PRESS/MAREN MICHAELIS

ELDER SEEK *PASSAGE* ON PROGGY SIXTH

From New England to Berlin, the heavy psych rockers get serious on *Innate Passage*.

Berlin-based heavy psych rockers Elder have unveiled details of their sixth full-length album. Set for release on November 25 via Stickman Records, *Innate Passage* builds on the template of 2020's acclaimed *Omens*, which was a notably sprawling and progressive work.

Vocalist/guitarist Nick DiSalvo says that the new, five-track record "channels the surreal world we live in from a fantastical point of view, and how we as humans processed that. Everyone is on their own passage through time and space and whatever version of reality they chose for themselves."

DiSalvo says the title came to him while writing in the wake of the pandemic: "Passage and transition are necessary in the human condition, and this process is intrinsic to us. All the growth and introspection we underwent in the past few years totally made this apparent to me more so than any other experiences in life."

Elder formed in Massachusetts in 2006, with the majority of the band relocating to Berlin before the release of their third album, *Lore*, in 2015. Joining DiSalvo once again are guitarist/keyboardist Mike Risberg, bassist Jack Donovan and, on only his second Elder record, drummer Georg Edert. The album's also notable for featuring the band's first guest performance, from Samavayo vocalist Behrang Alavi.

Elder are on tour with Pallbearer in Europe until November 5. For updates go to www.beholdtheelder.bandcamp.com. **POW**

EIGHT ALBUMS IN GANDALF'S FIST GET SUPERSTITIOUS!

Their new concept record *Widdershins* is due in November.

Cumbrian prog rockers Gandalf's Fist will issue their eighth album, *Widdershins*, on November 21 via their own Nightkeeper Productions.

It's the band's first new music since 2019's *The Clockwork Prologue*, and Fist frontman Dean Marsh tells *Prog* that each track "explores various aspects of how the human condition can be shaped through superstition — everything from burning witches at the stake to gazing wondrously at the stars. There's an interesting comparison between how superstition shaped the lives of ancient civilisations and how similar behaviours manifest themselves in the digital age, so the album very much dives deep into that. But with lots and lots of tasty riffs!"

Lead track *Sacrament* is out now, and the special edition, white double vinyl of the album will be available via specialist label Plane Groovy in late 2022/early 2023.

Pre-order info and more details can be found at www.gandalfsfist.com/widdershins. **GRM**

Gandalf's Fist are back. PRESS

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

THE UNSUNG MACHINE

Many electronic instruments have a "randomise" function which lets you shape and sculpt sound in unexpected ways. None of them, however, are as aesthetically gorgeous and conceptually sound as this: a machine constructed from brass and walnut, which uses combinations of letters to trigger MIDI data. Its appearance was inspired by antique telecommunication devices predating the QWERTY keyboard, and it's been used in collaborations between writers and its designer, Scottish musician Lomond Campbell. More of this kind of thing, please!
www.lomondcampbell.com

BEHRINGER STRING ENSEMBLE

You've definitely heard ARP's Solina String machine, of course you have. Perhaps its most famous appearance is on *Sound And Vision* from David Bowie's *Low*, but it was notable for being the first electronic instrument to credibly approximate the sound of a bunch of violinists. It also had other settings such as trumpet, horn and cello, but strings were its forte, and you'll hear it on recordings by artists as varied as Klaus Schulze and the Bee Gees. Due to go into production imminently, Behringer's budget clone also adds in a phaser, USB and MIDI.
www.behringer.com

MEGAFM MKII

The Sega Megadrive is currently enjoying a resurgence, with relaunched "mini" versions providing a nostalgic frisson for gamers who fondly remember its 1990s heyday. The console's sound chips, made by Yamaha, are also fondly recalled by those geeky enough to know their serial numbers – YM2612 and YM3438 – and these have now been incorporated into two synthesisers by French firm Twisted Electrons. Cutting-edge Sega sounds are now available to today's synth wizards, albeit 30 years late.
www.twistedelectrons.com

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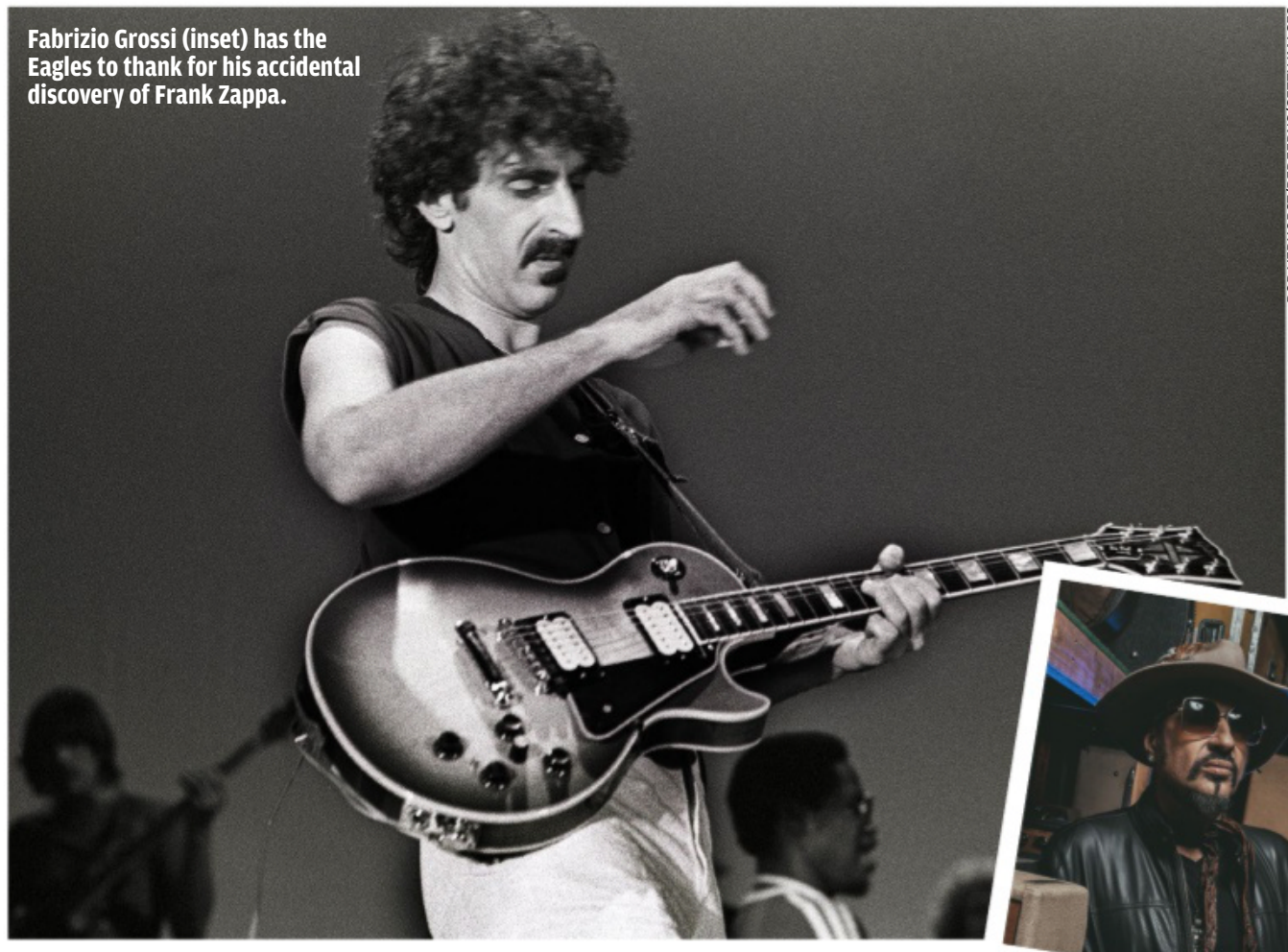

Fabrizio Grossi (inset) has the Eagles to thank for his accidental discovery of Frank Zappa.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

PRESS/ ALEX SOLCA

FABRIZIO GROSSI

Supersonic Blues Machine's acclaimed producer and bassist got into **Frank Zappa** by mistake, and has never looked back.

"In 1980 I dropped and broke my cousin's vinyl copy of an Eagles live album. I looked everywhere for a replacement copy in my home town of Milan but couldn't find one anywhere, then eventually this guy was selling his copy but would only sell it with this other record, which was *Freak Out* by Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention. I didn't know who they were.

At the time I was into rock bands like Van Halen and AC/DC, so when I put on *Freak Out* I was expecting loud guitars, banging drums and all that. I was not expecting that *madness*! Frank played Italy quite often, and I watched several shows after that and enjoyed them, but I had no great interest in his recordings until somebody gave me a copy of *Sheik Yerbouti* [1979]. That was life-changing.

I appreciated the music and the musicianship, and the lyrics too. I love his ability to make fun of things that are obviously idiotic, especially when they're extremely common or current. Take [disco-era fashion victim parody] *Dancing Fool* — he had the gall to give a description of what half the western world looked like at that time!

Musically, Frank was so innovative. He had a natural-born passion for rhythm and blues, and he'd include elements of classical music, cacophony, rock, blues, jazz fusion.

He was an incredible multi-instrumentalist. He started off as a drummer, went into guitars, then screwed around with synthesisers, he sang and obviously did the arrangements and the orchestrations. He was also a monster recording engineer, he ran his own label... Dude, when did you *sleep*?!

I actually did meet Frank, when I was 16 [in 1983] and studying English in London. I was in Soho with some friends, we looked over and there he was. We spent 10 minutes with him and he was so kind to us, talking to us in broken Italian. He had his briefcase, he was going to a meeting. My English was just good enough back then to tell him, 'I discovered you by mistake, and now I'm meeting you by luck!' And he said, 'I should remember that, it sounds like a good song title...'" **GRM**

"Frank was an incredible musician and a monster recording engineer."

Voodoo Nation is out on Mascot. See www.supersonicbluesmachine.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/ LORI LINSTRUTH

Ayreon's (right) 2000 releases *Universal Migrator Pt I & II* will be reissued – remixed and remastered – by Music Theories on November 18, with Neal Morse, Damian Wilson and Bruce Dickinson among the vocalists. More at www.arjenlucassen.com.

Oslo prog rock/pop quartet **Oak** will release their third album, *The Quiet Rebellion Of Compromise*, on November 11 through the Karisma label. The record was produced by David Castillo, AKA Ghost Ward (Opeth, Leprous). More at www.oakinoslo.com.

On October 28 the 40th anniversary stereo mixes of **King Crimson**'s *Discipline*, *Beat* and *Three Of A Perfect Pair* will be out on 200 gram vinyl via Panegyric. Mixes are by Steven Wilson and Robert Fripp, mastered by Jason Mitchell. See bit.ly/crimixes.

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UNPROCESSED

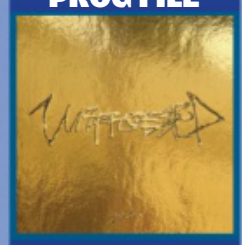
Modern progressive metal quartet find their winning formula.

UNPROCESSED RELEASED THEIR fourth album, *Gold*, over the summer and the resulting surge in popularity over their modern blend of progressive metal has filled their calendars to the brim. *Prog* asks where Unprocessed frontman Manuel Gardner Fernandes is calling from today, to which he responds, "Uh, I don't know actually!" He laughs before clarifying, "Someone just said we played Toronto last night, so somewhere near there, I guess."

Their recent North American tour dates showcased how the quartet's sound has evolved since their inception in 2014. Originally formed from the remnants of Fernandes' and fellow Unprocessed bandmate Christoph Schultz's death metal band These Days Remain, as well as current members David Levy and Leon Pfeifer's hardcore band Infecting Silence, the current-day sound of Unprocessed is far removed from its extreme roots. Staying true to the literal definition of Unprocessed, this material should be raw and unpolished but the German group deliver a refined, complex sound and fans of multiple genres will find something to grab them.

Citing original inspirations such as Metallica, Pantera and his dad's 80s thrash group, Fernandes says that forming a band was always his "plan A" but the move towards modern progressive music has been a long road. "We always loved progressive music," he says with a smile. "We started in 2014, writing prog metal and we released *In Concretion*, which was about 80 minutes long," he laughs, before adding, "it was quite a long record!"

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Manuel Gardner Fernandes *(vocals, guitar)*, **David Levy** *(bass, synth)*, **Leon Pfeifer** *(drums)*, **Christoph Schultz** *(guitar)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Modern prog metal with all the right elements of pop and electronica. Think TesseracT meets Aussies Voyager

CURRENT RELEASE

Gold is out now via Airforce1/Spinefarm

WEBSITE

www.unprocessed.band

The djent EP, *Perception*, followed in 2016, with their second and third albums — *Covenant* and *Artificial Void* —released in 2018 and 2019 respectively. "We've always had this prog element," he confirms, "but we wanted to create something new." *Gold* embraces melodic and poppier elements that Unprocessed hadn't explored before. "We wanted to do more vocal things," he says, before adding, "We wanted to change more things, we wanted to give the record a more personal touch.

"If you like music in general, are interested in music and want to explore and listen carefully to something really special, you'll like *Gold*," Fernandes explains. He certainly has a point. The album is an easy listen on the first play but repeat plays reveal much finesse and a truly beautiful take on modern progressive metal, with all the best elements of pop thrown in to accentuate the stunning songwriting.

In the creation of their latest record, Unprocessed have taken raw talent and combined it with a futuristic approach to progressive music, and with videos racking up views in the millions on YouTube, their refreshing style is certainly making an impact.

Unprocessed have been releasing music constantly since 2014, so when quizzed on the next moves for the band, Fernandes says, "Actually, it's the first time that I didn't write any material for future releases, so anything could happen." With *Gold* now available to stream and buy, we softly suggest a break to recharge, to which he laughs once more and repeats, "Anything could happen." **CF**

"We always had this prog element, but wanted to create something new."

PRESS/RIYA HOLLINGS

Unprocessed strike gold! L-R: David Levy, Christoph Schultz, Manuel Gardner Fernandes, Leon Pfeifer.

THE MEMBRANES

WHAT NATURE GIVES... NATURE TAKES AWAY

(Cherry Red, 2019)

Forged amid the snotty fires of punk, The Membranes emerged from the mean streets of Blackpool in the late 70s.

Part of a freewheeling post-punk movement that had precisely zero interest in the virtuoso excesses of progressive rock, they became one of the most celebrated underground bands of the 1980s. Adored by John Peel, they wrote songs with titles like *Spike Milligan's Tape Recorder* and *Postdetergent Vacuum Cleaner Man* and sounded as scrappily DIY as can be. They were, one could argue, the very antithesis of everything that prog had become by that point. In 1985 The Membranes even released an EP entitled *Death To Trad Rock*. So definitely not prog, then.

But time changes everything, of course. The Membranes originally split in 1990, but they reformed in 2009 at the request of My Bloody Valentine, who were curating that year's All Tomorrow's Parties festival. What was meant to be a one-off swiftly evolved into much more, and the band fronted by journalist and dapper polymath John Robb have subsequently released two widely acclaimed studio albums: 2015's *Dark Matter/Dark Energy* and 2019's *What Nature Gives... Nature Takes Away*. Both are fascinating, but *What Nature Gives...* – a double album peppered with numerous special guest cameos – is a particularly extraordinary and self-evidently progressive piece of work.

A concept piece, concerned with the changing of the seasons and humanity's place within nature, the record still shares a certain subversive streak with The Membranes' early works, but here their music blooms into something much more colourful and rich.

Songs like *The City Is An Animal (Nature Is Its Slave)* and *Deep In The Forest Where The Memories Linger* are still rooted in the thumping post-punk riffs of the early 80s, but now they come embellished with a thousand smart ideas, from dizzying detours into psychedelic rock to quasi-ambient poetry readings from late, great punk queen Jordan and, most gloriously, TV naturalist Chris Packham. The latter's contribution to *Winter (The Beauty And Violence Of Nature)* is profoundly moving in a way that you may not expecting from the ex-*Really Wild Show* presenter.

Meanwhile, *A Murmuration Of Starlings On Blackpool Pier* is simply stunning: a noirish crawl, propelled by jabbing strings, it features another poem, this time written and read by folk legend Shirley Collins. Elsewhere, *Mother Ocean/Father Time* and *Demon Seed/Demon Flower* embrace the squelching Moogs and stuttering beats of krautrock; *The Ghost Of Winter Stalks This Land* wrings cosmic dread from deep, dark dub; and the closing *Pandora's Box* is a veritable feast of new wave synths and wild choral flurries.

Admittedly, John Robb still sounds like someone likely to physically assault anyone accusing his band of being a prog band, but you can't have everything...

DOM LAWSON

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Seoul music: Dongyang Gozupa.

PRESS

DONGYANG GOZUPA

Inspired by bands including Rush, this Korean instrumental trio aim to bring K-prog to a global audience.

Describing themselves as "the gap between East and West," Seoul's instrumental trio Dongyang Gozupa merge traditional Korean music with prog approaches to percussion-based music. Eunhwa Yun leads the charge with his custom version of the traditional hammer-striking-strings instrument, the yanggeum, supported by bassist Minhwi Ham and percussionist Dohyuk Jang.

Just like one of their main Western influences, Rush, the band strive to have fun. "There's nothing more exciting than coming together to create music and perform," says Jang. "The process of finding the perfect musical complement to each other's playing — or creating a musical narrative by experimenting with different tones — bring us so much joy."

In South Korea's small prog scene, the genre's artists co-operate to build interest. "There are government programs that support young musicians," says Jang, "such as subsidising the cost of practice and rehearsal spaces. And collaborating with the traditional music and K-pop genres makes it easier to receive subsidies. Prog bands gather to hold small club festivals."

Dongyang Gozupa's high-energy performances have attracted worldwide interest. "All three of our instruments are rhythm instruments that perform by producing dots," adds Yun. "We aim to connect these dots to create lines. This is probably why we perform diligently at such a ferocious speed, creating lots of noise. Our audience is able to see our dripping sweat and laboured breathing!"

Jang describes their new, second album *Kyul* as their latest "calling card" and an arrow to their future: "*Kyul* is both a conclusion and a new beginning. Our wish is that it's an album of hope for people — one that carries the expectation that Dongyang Gozupa will always create fun and wonderful things."

UK audiences can witness the fun, the dripping sweat and laboured breathing when the trio tour England from October 29, closing with an appearance at the K-Music Festival at London's Southbank Centre on November 2. **MK**

See www.dongyanggozupa.bandcamp.com for more.

"Korea has government programs for young musicians."

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/VERONICA VAN GRONINGEN

Tunisian prog metallers **Myrath** headline French festival Ready For Prog, in Toulouse on October 29. Now in its fourth year, the event also features Klone, Seventh Wonder, Scar Symmetry, Kingcrow and more. Tickets at readyforprog.festik.net.

Norwegian guitar star **Hedvig Mollestad** (left) releases *Maternity Beat*, her latest ambitious album with Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, on November 18 via Rune Grammofon. Lead track *All Flights Cancelled* is out now, listen at bit.ly/hedvigprog.

PRESS

Dawnwalker with Mark Norgate (centre) are shaking things up.

DAWNWALKER

Ever-evolving English collective continue to defy pigeonholing on latest album.

THE IRONY BEHIND Dawnwalker's new record, *House Of Sand*, is that it is self-admittedly "claustrophobic and inward looking" – yet it could easily open up the group to a whole new audience. Gone are the 10-plus-minute opuses of the London-based collective's previous effort, *Ages*, with a greater focus on the song – and the metal edge is dialled down too. They must be one of the few bands who can cop comparisons to folk, shoegaze and black metal in the same breath, and they've previously been described as the "lovechild of Opeth and Kate Bush".

"On the last album, especially, we were trying to explore longer-form songs – we were kind of intentionally stretching everything out beyond the 10-minute mark," mainman Mark Norgate says. "And this time it's been the polar opposite. We've been trying to contract everything and do a lot in a short space of time and not dwell on one idea for too long.

"It's very different in that sense, and it's also kind of a conscious move away from metal and riffs into something a bit more song-based, but more unusual song ideas."

Dawnwalker's origins effectively lie in the splendour of Norgate's bedroom, with the project birthed as an outlet for material that didn't suit the rehearsal rooms of his post-rock and post-metal groups. It pirouetted on an ambient, loop-led vibe to begin with, evolving over time to pay homage to the traditional song arguably led by his eclectic influences. Part of Norgate's musical awakening in his youth came via metal noiseniks Emperor, led by mercurial talent Ihsahn, while Kate Bush, PJ Harvey and Mansun were also on his mind.

With every album – *House Of Sand* is their fifth – Dawnwalker bring together a new cast of musicians, augmenting a core membership, which enables the vocalist-guitarist to blossom new sounds and atmospheres with each record.

"It's half by design and half by happy accident, or just necessity really," he explains. "There's a desire to freshen things up with each album, try new ideas. But it's also a case of who's there at the time, where we're recording, and what the circumstances are."

The first full-lengther, *In Rooms*, was released a decade ago – precursor *XIII* came out in 2012 under the banner of Dreamers Awake – but what ensued was self-admittedly stop-start. With the collective evolving with each release, however, and live shows in the mix too, the cult of Dawnwalker continues to grow. But the future is less than certain, at least until Norgate finds the inspiration to go again.

"After every album I sort of feel it probably is the last one and I don't have any more songs, and that's me done," Norgate concedes. "I'm in that phase right now and I know a month or two down the line I'll start picking up guitar or keyboard or piano or something and new stuff will start coming out. But it's at a very indefinite point right now where it could go in any direction, and I don't have a clear idea of what I want to explore next." **CC**

"On the last album, we were trying to explore longer-form songs. And this time it's been the polar opposite."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Chris J Allan *(drums)*, **Matteo Bianciotto** *(guitars, vocals)*, **Dane Cross** *(vocals)*, **Mina Jackson** *(piano)*, **Robin Melinda Koob** *(violin)*, **Mark Norgate** *(vocals, guitars)*, **Roisin O'Toole** *(vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Atmospheric musings reminiscent of current-day Opeth mingling with Radiohead

CURRENT RELEASE

House Of Sand is out now via Room 132.

WEBSITE

www.dawnwalker.uk

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

September 2022

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **MUSE** Will Of The People *(WARNER/HELIUM-3)*
2 **PINK FLOYD** Animals (2018 Remix) *(RHINO)*
3 **STEVE HACKETT** Genesis Revisited Live: Seconds Out & More *(INSIDEOUT)*
4 **KING'S X** Three Sides Of One *(INSIDEOUT)*
5 **MARILLION** Holidays In Eden *(PARLOPHONE)*
6 **THE MARS VOLTA** The Mars Volta *(CLOUDS HILL)*
7 **RADIOHEAD** Kid A Mnesia *(XL RECORDINGS)*
8 **10CC** The Things We Do For Love *(XPLODED MUSIC)*
9 **LONELY ROBOT** A Model Life *(INSIDEOUT)*
10 **BLACK MIDI** Hellfire *(ROUGH TRADE)*
11 **TAME IMPALA** The Slow Rush – B Sides & Remixes *(FICTION)*
12 **PINK FLOYD** A Momentary Lapse Of Reason *(PARLOPHONE)*
13 **GENESIS** The Last Domino? *(UMC/VIRGIN)*
14 **PORCUPINE TREE** Closure/Continuation *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
15 **RUSH** Moving Pictures *(UMC/VIRGIN)*
16 **MARILLION** An Hour Before It's Dark *(EARMUSIC)*
17 **COHEED AND CAMBRIA** Vaxis II – A Window Of The Waking Mind *(ROADRUNNER)*
18 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Bright Magic *(PIAS)*
19 **CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX** Banefyre *(SEASON OF MIST)*
20 **JETHRO TULL** The Zealot Gene *(INSIDEOUT)*
21 **LONG DISTANCE CALLING** Eraser *(EARMUSIC)*
22 **DREAM THEATER** Lost Not Forgotten Archives: Images And Words Demos *(INSIDEOUT)*
23 **MASTODON** Hushed And Grim *(REPRISE)*
24 **SPIRITUALIZED** Everything Was Beautiful *(BELLA UNION)*
25 **WARDRUNA** Kvitravn – The First Flight Of The White Raven *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
26 **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** Omnium Gatherum *(KGLW)*
27 **YES** The Quest *(INSIDEOUT)*
28 **SOFT MACHINE** Bundles *(SEE FOR MILES)*
29 **MESHUGGAH** Immutable *(ATOMIC FIRE)*
30 **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** Night Gnomes *(MARATHON ARTISTS)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! GENTLE GIANT BOX SET

Following on from their mammoth *Unburied Treasure* trove, Gentle Giant have dug further into their archive to shower fans with more treats, this time it's in the shape of *Front Row Centre: US Dates 1976-1980*. It's reviewed on p97 of this very issue and we've got a copy to give away to one lucky reader.

This limited-edition 10-LP set, currently available to purchase in North America only, takes listeners through the prog collective's live experience and contains performances from shows including Calderone Concert Hall in Hempstead, NY; Widener College in Chester, PA; and Agora Ballroom in Atlanta, Georgia, the latter of which was recorded during the band's final tour. The package is completed by an exclusive 60-page book crammed with unseen photographs and images of very rare memorabilia.

To be in with a chance of winning this brilliant prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG134 and answer the following question:

Which album were Gentle Giant touring for the 1977 Calderone Concert Hall show, which is included in the box set?

a) *The Missing Piece*
b) *Giant For A Day*
c) *Interview*

For more information see www.gentlegiantmusic.com.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from October 21-November 25, 2022. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competitionrules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices or methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

ARENA
The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance
VERGLAS

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

HEDVIG MOLLESTAD & TRONDHEIM JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Maternity Beat
RUNE GRAMMOFON

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

MARATON
Unseen Color
INDIE RECORDINGS

The Musician
Steve Hillage

DZIHAN & KAMIEN
Lost & Found
COUCH RECORDS

The Writer
Cheri Faulkner

TIBERIUS
A Peaceful Annihilation
TIBERIUSUK.BANDCAMP.COM

The Reader
Alex Hogg

BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD
Ants From Up There
NINJA TUNE

PRESS/FREDERIC D OBERLAND

Oiseaux-Tempête plus guest collaborators. L-R: GW Sok, Radwan Ghazi Moumneh, Frédéric D Oberland, Mondkopf, Jean-Michel Pirès, Stéphane Pigneul, Jessica Moss.

OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE

French post-rock experimentalists embark on a journey to another dimension.

OISEAUX-TEMPÊTE STARTED WHEN Frédéric Oberland travelled to Greece in 2012 with photographer Stéphane Charpentier to document the economic and political turmoil there. The situation inspired him to start a new musical project as a reaction. "Back in Paris, I asked my friend Stéphane Pigneul, with whom I played in FareWell Poetry and Le Réveil Des Tropiques, to join me to sonically improvise around this trip." Pigneul recalls, "Everything happened very quickly, naturally and to be honest without any artistic career in mind. We just had one rehearsal jam in a random studio… [we recorded a session and sent] the material to our favourite label Sub Rosa and they replied in a day, telling us they wanted to sign us. It was a fantastic period of creation and friendship."

They later added multi-instrumentalist Paul Régimbeau, known by his alias Mondkopf, to form a trio. Although the core was stable, they remained restless, with a curiosity to explore the wider world. They travelled back to Greece for their 2013 debut, then to Turkey and Sicily for 2015's *Ütopiya?*. Their 2017 album, *Al-'An* was part-recorded in Lebanon, and *From Somewhere Invisible* was tracked at Hotel2Tango in Montreal in 2019. Just as the band's genesis came from a non-musical inspiration, these records were as much inspired by place, local collaborators, and found sounds and field recordings.

Now a sprawling collective, there's a marked difference between the band as a live presence versus on record. As squalling and dynamic as they are, their studio recordings are an attempt to bottle lightning. As Pigneul explains, "We just jump into the music, let our momentary influences guide us, pick up some tricks in our pockets when we feel stuck, but that's all. We improv, then edit, then sometimes add some layers when we feel it misses something, and then we mix."

In the case of upcoming release *What On Earth*, this process was "almost five years of different sessions," according to Oberland, "from big ensembles with six or seven musicians in the studio to more intimate sessions as a trio with Stéphane and Paul." There was then a concerted effort to arrange and mix with a view to a more polished result than some of their previous efforts.

As they look ahead to performing the album live, Oberland observes, "We have to remind [ourselves] how to play these tracks as we often played it just once, for the recording."

Pigneul agrees, "We are constantly improvising in the studio and on stage… We never perform twice the same track basically, so we can't ever be bored!"

Just as their musical DNA has a common core but individual differences, what the trio love about music also differs. "[Music] is a universal language pushing all boundaries," begins Oberland.

Pigneul picks up, "The weightlessness that you feel when you listen to or play music is like magic, you are just transported to another dimension."

Mondkopf finishes the thought, "It's a connection with people, but also with the inner self. The power of sound [has] a mysterious effect which transforms time and space." **AL**

"Everything happened very quickly, naturally and without any artistic career in mind."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Frédéric D Oberland *(guitar, Mellotron, synth, keys, flute, sax, percussion)*, **Stéphane Pigneul** *(synth, keys, bass, percussion, programming)*, **Paul 'Mondkopf' Régimbeau** *(synths, vocals, percussion, guitar, programming)*, **plus guests**

SOUNDS LIKE

Psychedelic, orchestral music with elements of jazz and post-rock

CURRENT RELEASE

What On Earth (Que Diable) is out on October 28 via Sub Rosa/Nahal Recordings

WEBSITE

www.oiseaux-tempete.com

BEN CRAVEN

MONSTERS FROM THE ID

A grandiose, charming & affectionate celebration of classic prog. -Prog (UK)

The flow from idea to idea is seamless and sublime. -Sea Of Tranquility (US)

A truly monstrous work of unique genius. -Via Nocturna (Portugal)

This is symphonic rock heaven! -Background Magazine (Netherlands)

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bencraven.bandcamp.com

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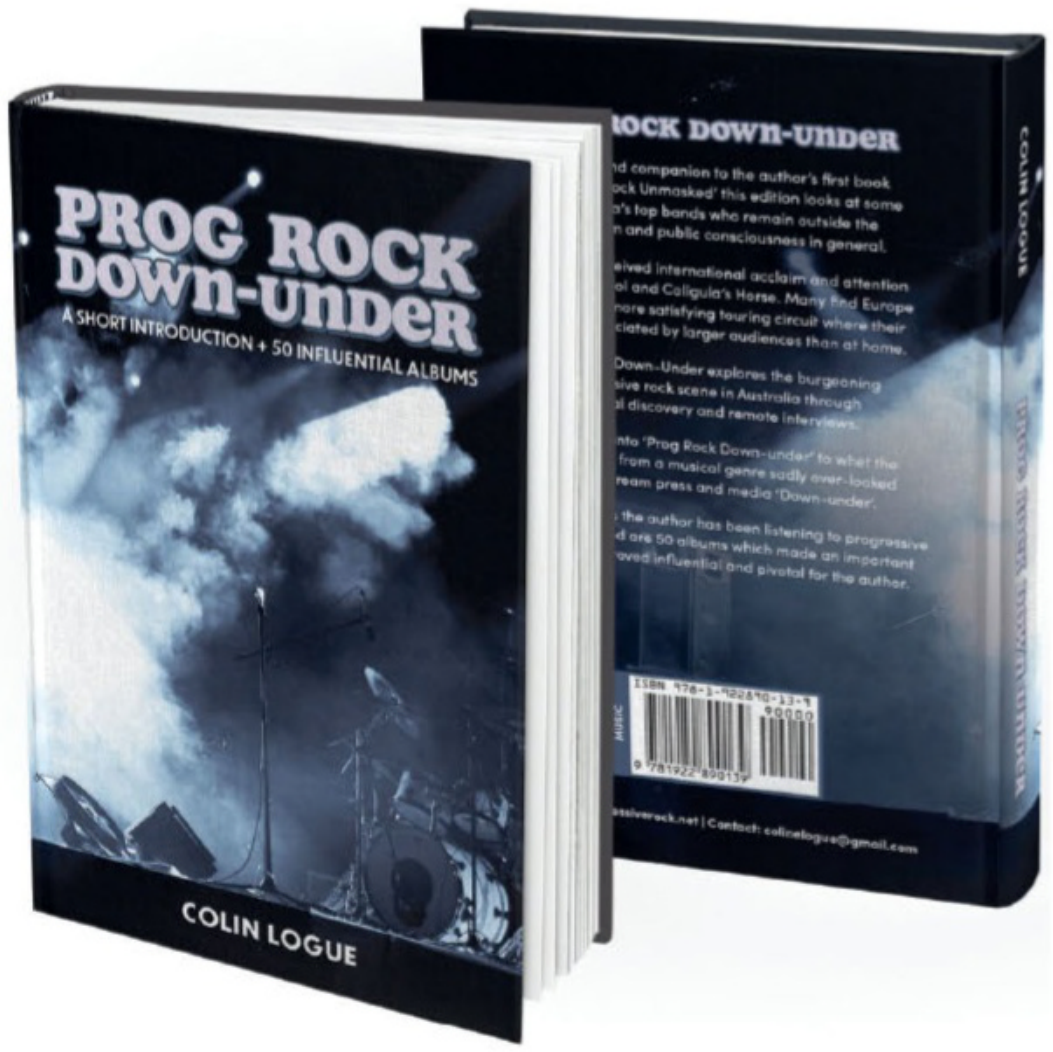

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THE HIRSCH EFFEKT

This German trio could be the most eclectic band you've never heard of.

HIRSCH EFFEKT BASSIST and co-vocalist Ilja John Lappin categorises his band's music as "progressive metal with an indie touch". It's a description that drastically undersells their restless eclecticism. Since forming in 2008, the trio have become one of prog's weirdest bands, with the list of genres they've folded into their canon being long enough to cram a *Yellow Pages*.

"'Progressive' really is a good term for our music," Lappin tells *Prog*, speaking after a slot at 2022's ArcTanGent Festival with drummer Moritz Schmidt at his side. "It means that our music keeps evolving and becoming something different — that there's a root that we're growing from. And sometimes, on previous albums, that root can be metal. Sometimes it can be post-hardcore, or a different kind of music. We've always, from a certain root, spread out into so many different genres."

Even on a line-up crammed with prog and post-rock royalty, The Hirsch Effekt's set at ArcTanGent was unlike anything else. What they played ranged from *Kris* — a math rocker with an infectious, dual-vocalist chorus — to *Xenophotophobia*: a jagged and experimental punk cut with mind-warping technical guitar work.

All three members are songwriters, and they have wildly different music tastes. Lappin enjoys prog rock and metal, as well as ambient and electronic music. Singer/guitarist Nils Wittrock is into indie and hardcore, while Schmidt expresses a fondness for anything obscure. The only album every member owns is The Mars Volta's *De-Loused In The Comatorium*.

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Nils Wittrock *(guitar, vocals)*, **Ilja John Lappin** *(bass, vocals)*, **Moritz Schmidt** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Heavy prog that's downed all the coffee in the world, darting between countless genres at breakneck speed

CURRENT RELEASE

Solitaer is out now via Long Branch

WEBSITE

www.thehirscheffekt.de

When the world entered lockdown in 2020, The Hirsch Effekt used it to their advantage. Each member composed their own song in isolation, then presented it to the rest of the band. The resulting trilogy of tracks is on their latest EP, *Solitaer*. Lappin wrote *Palingenesis* (a Between The Buried And Me-style cavalcade of intricate riffs), Schmidt penned the erratic jazz-mathcore of *Amorphus*, and Wittrock is responsible for *Nares* and its grooving post-rock.

"What usually works well is that we'd write in groups of two," Lappin explains.

Schmidt adds: "Sometimes ideas can be combined. You would never have thought that two pieces could be compatible, but then something evolves and they can be put together. Sometimes we just put them together for a joke!"

The Hirsch Effekt's last album, *Kollaps*, came out in May 2020, but the band flatly refused to release another LP during the pandemic, citing the inability to tour off the back of it. However, now they're able to get back on the road, they're finally looking ahead to their sixth full-length release.

"We've recorded the drums for three songs," says Schmidt. "I think the guitars on them are completely done, as well."

"It's not gonna be the typical Hirsch Effekt album," Lappin promises. "It's going to be very moody. It'll be soft and then very, very brutal. It's going to be atmospheric and dark."

Until it sees the light of day, we still have the *Solitaer* EP to explore the full breadth of this band's range in three unclassifiable tracks. **MM**

"We've always spread out into so many different genres."

The Hirsch Effekt, L-R: Nils Wittrock, Moritz Schmidt, Ilja John Lappin.

PRESS/CHRISTOPH EISENMENGER

Q&A

DAVID PAICH

Toto's co-founder – and the man behind some of their biggest songs – discusses his prog-friendly solo debut, his love of ELP and why he's changing up his live rigs.

Words: Tim Batcup
Portrait: Alessandro Solca

Six Grammys, one Emmy, 40 million sales: keyboardist, songwriter, producer, singer, not to mention crack session man, Toto's David Paich has chalked up a fulsome career, rich in both breadth and success. Working with such luminaries as Quincy Jones, Stevie Nicks, Rod Stewart, Michael Jackson, Miles Davis, Joan Baez, Ray Charles, Elton John and a plethora of other A-listers, Paich also co-wrote and sang Toto's hit single *Africa* — a song with exceedingly long legs. Amassing a host of extremely talented friends along the way, and immersed in a life of music, Paich's musical history touches on all corners of modern rock and pop. But prog?

Now releasing his debut solo album at the age of 68, we caught up with the affable Paich at his home in LA County.

For such a storied and collaborative career, what was the impetus to release a solo album after all this time?
Well, my friends Steve Lukather and Joseph Williams were working on their solo records and were prodding me to get mine out there, so we'd have three out at the same time — we weren't really in Toto mode. Joseph helped me frame these little musical puzzles I'd had for seven or eight years, they just needed a facelift.

You've got some big-name friends on the record — Don Felder, Brian Eno, Steve Jordan, a cast of thousands — how did that come about?
They're just my friends. It was like casting a movie. Once we'd demoed the songs, we sat and cast the players for each one: 'Who do we get to play drums on this? Gregg Bissonette? Steve Jordan?' I'm lucky, my friends happen to be fantastic players.

> **"Keith Emerson was the man! We bought modular gear so we could get the big sounds like Keith."**

You know them musically well enough that you think that a certain style is going to fit a certain groove, etc?
Absolutely. I know those guys backwards and forwards, their capabilities. It comes from session work.

Of all your big hits, *Africa* in particular has had an incredibly long tail — over 1 billion streams, sampled and covered extensively — what is it about that song that has proved so enduring?
It's a phenomenon to me; I can't put my finger on it. If it wasn't a hit I'd say, 'That's a nice little album cut.' We thought the hits were already on the record: *Rosanna*, I thought *Make Believe* was going to be a giant hit. *Africa* came out of nowhere, it was an 11th-hour song, it barely made the album. We had fun with it like The Beatles did, made a loop, adding instruments one at a time, and then it just took off. It had some plays in dance clubs in New York, and that's all it takes. I think it's just really different to anything else we've done. Sometimes it takes being unique to make something popular.

Thinking about instrumentation, in some ways the timeline of your career dovetails with the development of the synthesiser. Would you agree?
In the early days, Steve and I had seen Emerson, Lake & Palmer, so that was a pretty huge influence. Keith had a nine-foot grand, a Moog, and two Hammond organs on stage. He was our Jimi Hendrix — he was the man! So, we bought modular gear, not the Minimoogs, we wanted the monster stuff so we could get the big sounds like Keith. I took my grand on the road, we had keyboards on top of it, keyboards here, keyboards everywhere. I had to cover a lot of the overdubs from the synth parts on the records, there was no midi. But as I got older, my role became more of a piano player, and a Hammond organ player. Right now, I play a Nord because I like the touch, our rigs are much smaller, we have a guy offstage who changes the pre-mixed sounds and combinations for each song — it's complicated.

You're on record as being influenced by the big 70s prog bands: Genesis, Pink Floyd, Yes, even Gentle Giant. Could you tell us about those influences?
I hadn't heard of King Crimson, I'd heard ELP, but hadn't seen them live at that point. Jeff [Porcaro, Toto's drummer] was listening to them both. Yes were very big with us. Procol Harum had a huge influence because they had two keyboard players, plus Robin Trower on guitar, which was kind of the same setup we had. We were just always trying to expand the limits of the musicality, make rock'n'roll more musically interesting to musicians, and to our musician friends. Jeff was playing with Steely Dan, and at the same time we were doing sessions with Seals and Crofts, and Boz Scaggs. As far as creativity went, we always wanted to extend the bookends. You can hear that on the title track on *Hydra*. We found out that when you play live, you can't just play three-minute pop stuff. You have to get into some deep material. Like Yes were doing. They were the most phenomenal group we'd ever seen. We took notice! We started doing solo spots where we hadn't before, we were trying to be progressive from the second album on. We admired the British; we weren't big fans of American groups for some reason. I was into Yes, not The Eagles.

Another label that's been used to describe your music is progressive pop. How do you view that term? What bands would you classify as such?
I'm not even sure what that is. I don't think of too many people being that progressive. Kendrick Lamar is. Some of the rap stuff is pretty progressive. I like Justin Timberlake, but I'm not that familiar with it. I think prog bands used to be able to have hit singles, but now it doesn't cross over. I like Imagine Dragons, Adele, Sam Smith — there's a lot of great singers out there at the minute. Lady Gaga. There is one guy I think is super-progressive — Jacob Collier — look him up, he's a one-man Wrecking Crew. He's as talented as Stevie Wonder!

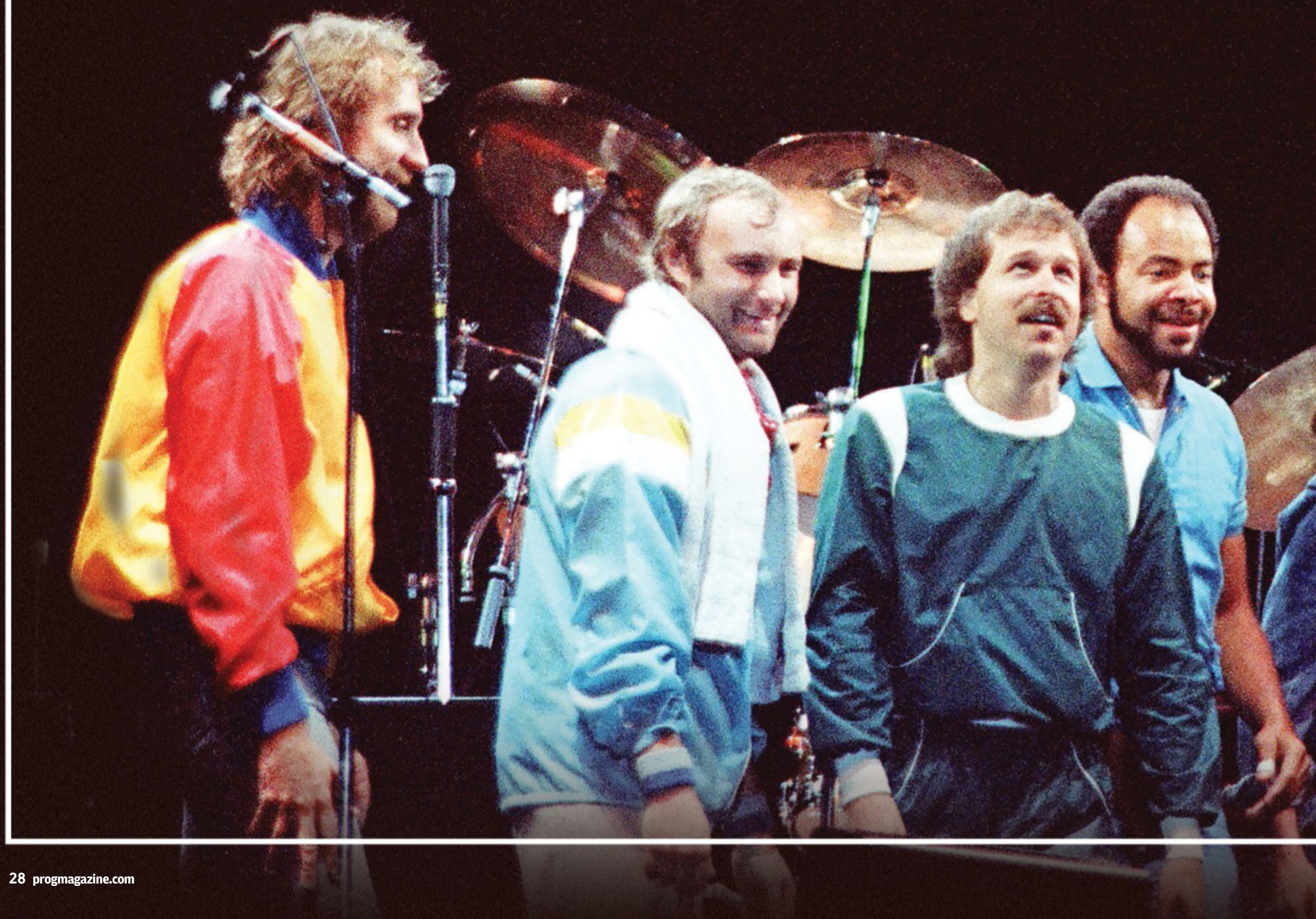
Forgotten Toys out now via The Players Club/Mascot. See www.totoofficial.com for more information.

SIX OF THE BEST

DARK AND GREY: SIX OF THE BEST

Forty years ago, **Genesis**' classic line-up reunited for a one-off show at the Milton Keynes Bowl. Billed as Six Of The Best, its aim was to raise money for Peter Gabriel's then debt-ridden WOMAD project. Although the concert was never recorded, it holds a special place in the hearts of bandmembers and fans alike, who look back and recall the time that one of the UK's biggest prog bands performed in a very muddy clay pit.

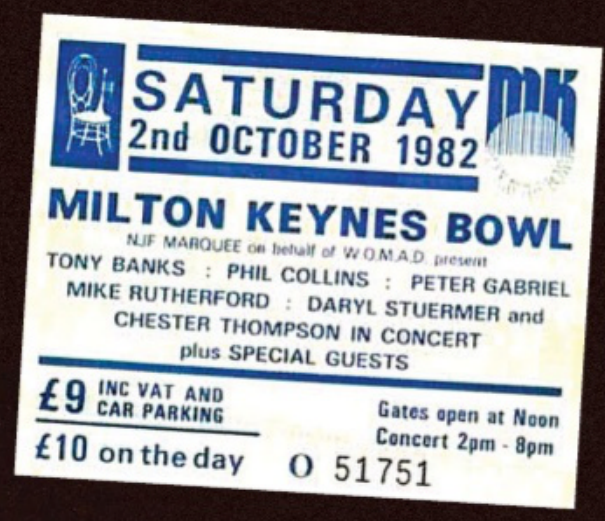
Words: Daryl Easlea
Portrait: Alan Perry



It was almost as unbelievable as a storyline on one of their early albums. In October 1982, Genesis reunited with their mercurial co-founder and original lead singer Peter Gabriel for a one-off concert in an act of generosity that underlined the group's inherent grace.

Possibly the most successful school band ever, Genesis, by this time, were well on their way to a level of stardom that could not have been imagined when Gabriel had left them after the troubled *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* album and tour in 1974/1975. In fact, many had simply written the group off, thinking that they were Gabriel's backing band, without realising he was merely part of a collective.

After stepping out of the machinery of Genesis, Peter Gabriel had carved himself a niche as one of art-pop's key troubadours. No longer restrained by his old school pals, each of his solo albums highlighted his adventurousness, sense of play, logic and integrity. However, in 1982, his abundant curiosity had gotten him into a king-sized scrape.



He had co-founded a global music festival, World Of Music And Dance (WOMAD), which ran for three days in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, that July. Although ground-breaking and artistically triumphant, it was a commercial calamity and had run massively aground. As Gabriel was 'the famous face' on the organising committee, he was faced with colossal debts, incensed creditors, potential bankruptcy and, far worse, alleged death threats against himself and his family.

On hearing this, his old band agreed to reunite with him for a concert for old time's sake to save him — and his festival — from ruin. They would donate all the proceeds from this event to WOMAD to get it out of its huge hole. And speaking of huge holes, they chose to put on the show in a colossal re-purposed clay pit, 55 miles north of central London in Milton Keynes, one of the new towns designated by the UK government after the Second World War. The Milton Keynes Bowl — as the venue was grandly known — had opened in 1979, and earlier in 1982 had played host to an enormous event by Queen.

The Genesis reunion, known as Six Of The Best, was held on October 2, 1982. Aside from it being Mike Rutherford's 32nd birthday, it was a day when it rained and rained and rained and rained. And rained.

With a mixture of new interviews and on-the-record information, this is the story of the concert, an improbable, yet ultimately triumphant day.

"It was a bit like going to school when you haven't been there for 30 years; in this case it was only six years, but it still felt like a lifetime."

Peter Gabriel

Dramatis Personae (in order of appearance)

PETER GABRIEL
Former Genesis frontman (from 1967–1975), solo artist and the co-founder of WOMAD festival

DARYL STUERMER
Touring guitarist with Genesis from 1978

MIKE RUTHERFORD
Bassist-guitarist with Genesis from 1967

RICHARD MACPHAIL
One-time 'sixth member' of Genesis

SIMON BRENNER
Keyboardist with Talk Talk, 1981-1983

STEVE HACKETT
Guitarist with Genesis, 1971–1977

GARY HARRIES
An attendee

ROGER MORGAN
Editor of *Afterglow* fanzine

KEV MELLOTRON
An attendee

JOHN CHADWICK
An attendee

TONY STRATTON-SMITH
Charisma Records founder and Genesis manager 1970-1973

STEVEN PRITCHARD
Co-founder of WOMAD and journalist with *Bristol Recorder* and *The Recorder*

GAIL COLSON
Peter Gabriel's manager, 1977-1990

PETER HAMMILL
Van der Graaf Generator frontman and performer at WOMAD 1982

PHIL COLLINS
Drummer and vocalist with Genesis from 1970

TONY BANKS
Keyboardist with Genesis from 1967

CHESTER THOMPSON
Live drummer with Genesis, 1976-1992 and 2007

HUGH FIELDER
Journalist with *Sounds* magazine

DAVID BUCKLEY
An attendee

PREFACE: TO THE MULTITUDE WHO STAND IN THE RAIN, MILTON KEYNES OCTOBER 1982

No account of Six Of The Best can ever be made without talking about just how awful the weather was. Everyone was not just soaked, they were sodden. Sopping. Drenched. Saturated. So, let us first deal with the elephant in the room directly...

Peter Gabriel: It was pissing down with rain.

Daryl Stuermer: I remember the rain.

Mike Rutherford: It was pissing with rain.

Richard Macphail: It literally is the only day I remember in all my life when it was raining when we got up, rained all day, and was raining when we went to sleep. In England, it so rarely does that. It was solid, the whole day. It was extraordinary.

Simon Brenne: I don't remember much apart from that it was raining.

Steve Hackett: It poured all day and all night. Everybody remembers that.

> Legendarily wet, seems to be the Genesis curse. If there's something taking place outdoors, it will rain; that was certainly true of my time with the band. And I think way beyond all that, too.

Peter Gabriel: It started at about 6am and went on to 2am, solid rain.

Gary Harries: It did not let up all day. By the end of the show, we were standing in super-slimy mud that was ankle-deep across the entire front of the stage area.

Roger Morgan: That damned deluge... I thought of building an ark. I was reminded of the 1950s Ray Bradbury sci-fi short story *The Long Rain*, about astronauts driven mad on a planet by the constant rain hammering on their heads.

Page 4 SOUNDS August 28, 1982

Gabriel, the angel of mercy

GENESIS and Peter Gabriel are reuniting for one benefit concert at the Milton Keynes Bowl on October 2, the proceeds of which will go to alleviate the debts incurred by the recent World Of Music Arts And Dance Festival at Shepton Mallet.

It's the first time that Genesis and Gabriel have performed together since Gabriel left the band in 1975 and it's stressed that it's strictly a one-off show.

In fact the concert is officially billed as 'Tony Banks, Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford, Darryl Stuermer and Chester Thompson' rather than Genesis and Peter Gabriel, probably for legal reasons and to dampen any speculation that the reunion might be permament.

Peter Gabriel was involved in the recent WOMAD Festival at Shepton Mallet which brought together one of the widest ranging line-ups of ethnic groups from all over the world ever assembled in this country but lost a small fortune after failing to attract enough punters.

The organisers went into liquidation immediately afterwards and although Gabriel is not personally liable for any of the debts he clearly feels a moral obligation to help cover some of the 'substantial' unpaid bills. And Genesis, who will have just completed a British tour by then, are obviously happy to help out.

The open-air gig will run from 2pm to 8pm and the rest of the bill will be announced later. Tickets are priced at £9 in advance and are available by post only in advance from NJF/Marquee, PO Box 4SQ, London W1A. Make cheques and postal orders payable to 'NJF/Marquee' and enclose an SAE. If there are any tickets on the day, they will cost £10.

***Sounds* article from August 28, 1982 announcing the one-off event.**

New interviews with Simon Brenner, Steve Hackett, Richard Macphail and attendees, September 2022. On the record quotes come from *NME*, 1982; Six Of The Best event programme; Tony Banks, Gail Colson, Peter Hammill, Mike Rutherford quotes from *Without Frontiers — The Life and Music Of Peter Gabriel* by Daryl Easlea. Other quotes from *Genesis Revisited* by Alan Hewitt; Genesis: *Chapter & Verse*; Hugh Fielder, *Sounds*, 9 October 1982; Chester Thompson, *Rolling Stone* interview, 2020; Phil Collins *Not Dead Yet;* Daryl Stuermer, *Rolling Stone* interview, 2019; Tony Stratton-Smith, *Music Week* October 23, 1982; Stephen Pritchard taken from sleevenotes for *Live At WOMAD 1982* (Real World LPRW245), used with kind permission by Oran Mullan/Real World.

CUTTINGS: WWW.THEGENESISARCHIVE.CO.UK

Kev Mellotron: Rain? I've never been so wet in my life. I was completely caked in mud!

John Chadwick: It was awful — I was soaked through to the skin by the end.

Tony Stratton-Smith: Only a Genesis audience can make a Pakamac look like a kaftan.

ONE BEYOND YOUR SHOW: WOMAD JULY 1982

As we dry, let us go back to the beginning, when a noble idea by Peter Gabriel in 1980 slowly began to turn into a reality, and WOMAD was born.

Stephen Pritchard: In October 1980, Thomas Brooman and I interviewed Peter Gabriel for our vinyl-with-magazine creation, *The Bristol Recorder*, later *The Recorder*. Peter generously gave us previously unreleased tracks for our record. After the interview, we talked about a tape of Indonesian gamelan music that I had in my pocket, Thomas' experience of South American music and Peter's work with rhythms from various African countries.

Peter Gabriel: It was a simple idea: to create a festival out of all the brilliant music and art made all over the world, stuff made outside of the mainstream — music that wasn't getting on the radio and was even harder to find in record stores.

Stephen Pritchard: The process was entirely new to us. The largest events we had done were promotions of local bands, in local venues. There were far fewer large festivals at that time. In continental Europe, non-Western arts were showcased in government funded buildings. The Drummers Of Burundi and the Qawwali legends, the Sabri Brothers, were an early inspiration.

Peter Gabriel: We were having regular brainstorming meetings and [they] offered to take over the day-to-day management in their Bristol office.

Gail Colson: I was worried about the people Peter was surrounding himself with and who he was leaving to organise it. I had nothing against them personally, but they had no experience of running a festival at all. I had been very friendly with the Pendletons and the rest of the people who ran the Reading Festival and owned the Marquee club and the original Jazz & Blues Festivals and felt that he should use them.

An advert for the first WOMAD festival.

ROGEER MORGAN

Peter Gabriel at the first WOMAD.

"Whether or not he felt he needed our help to get himself out of trouble, it made sense to us, and it was certainly not a condescending gesture."
Phil Collins

Steve Hackett: I think WOMAD was an extraordinary idea. I know it was largely sold because of Peter.

Gail Colson: I said to my PA, while we were driving to Shepton Mallet, that something was wrong. She'd never been to a festival and asked me why. My reply was that we were the only car on the road and we should've been in a traffic jam! When we arrived there seemed to be more people walking about with laminates than there were audience.

Peter Hammill: Artistically it was well on-the-spot; I particularly enjoyed the last night headline band of PG, David Rhodes, Shankar, Larry Fast, Stuart Copeland and myself. Very wild.

Stephen Pritchard: One journalist wrote of hearing English church bells anew as she left the site: echoes across cultures, sympathetic sounds.

Gail Colson: I spent most of the time in the box office, collecting whatever cash there was and prioritising who should be paid immediately and who could wait. The Drummers Of Burundi — pay; the Chinese delegation — pay.

Peter Gabriel: I'm very hopeful that even if we can't continue the idea is going to be pushed through by some others because if nothing else, we showed that a rock audience could give a standing ovation to a 50-year-old Chinese horn player — that was great.

TO SAVE MY STEEPLE, I VISITED PEOPLE: THE AFTERMATH OF WOMAD

It soon became clear that due to poor weather, a national train strike and a lack of understanding about what a festival of world music and dance might entail, WOMAD had not made any money. It was in debt to a figure quoted between £190,000 to £200,000. A lot of money now, but a huge sum then.

Stephen Pritchard: And then it was over. The *NME* headline proclaimed 'WOMAD brilliant but bust.' Despair.

Peter Gabriel: Ambition got ahead of reality. We went in there with evangelical fervour, and we thought everyone else was going to be as excited as we were. It became a nightmare experience when we realised there was no way we were getting the tickets to cover our costs. The debts were way above what I could manage but people saw me as the only fat cat worth squeezing so I got a lot of nasty phone calls and a death threat.

Peter Hammill: It was a wonderful festival but obviously the weather played havoc with the finances.

Peter Gabriel: It was clear we had an artistic success — but financially it delivered us a knock-out punch. It was the new and scary territory of bankruptcy we had entered — we had lost a lot of money, certainly more than I could sort out and we had no idea how we were going to pay off the debts. People were pursuing us very hard.

Richard Macphail: I was mostly in touch with [Peter's then-wife] Jill Gabriel around then. She was absolutely terrified to pick up the phone. They were living at Ashcombe Farm, that crazy place that Peter rented at the

time, where he built the studio in a tumble-down barn where you couldn't even lock the front door. Jill filled me in with what was going on and it really was very worrying.

Peter Gabriel: My part in the whole thing was not as great as it might have been. I was busy working on my album [*Peter Gabriel 4,* aka *Security*] at the same time as helping these people from the *Bristol Recorder* who'd given up two years of their lives and were living on dole money to set this up.

Steve Hackett: It lost something like £250,000.

Peter Hammill: It was very stressful for Peter with all the flak flying.

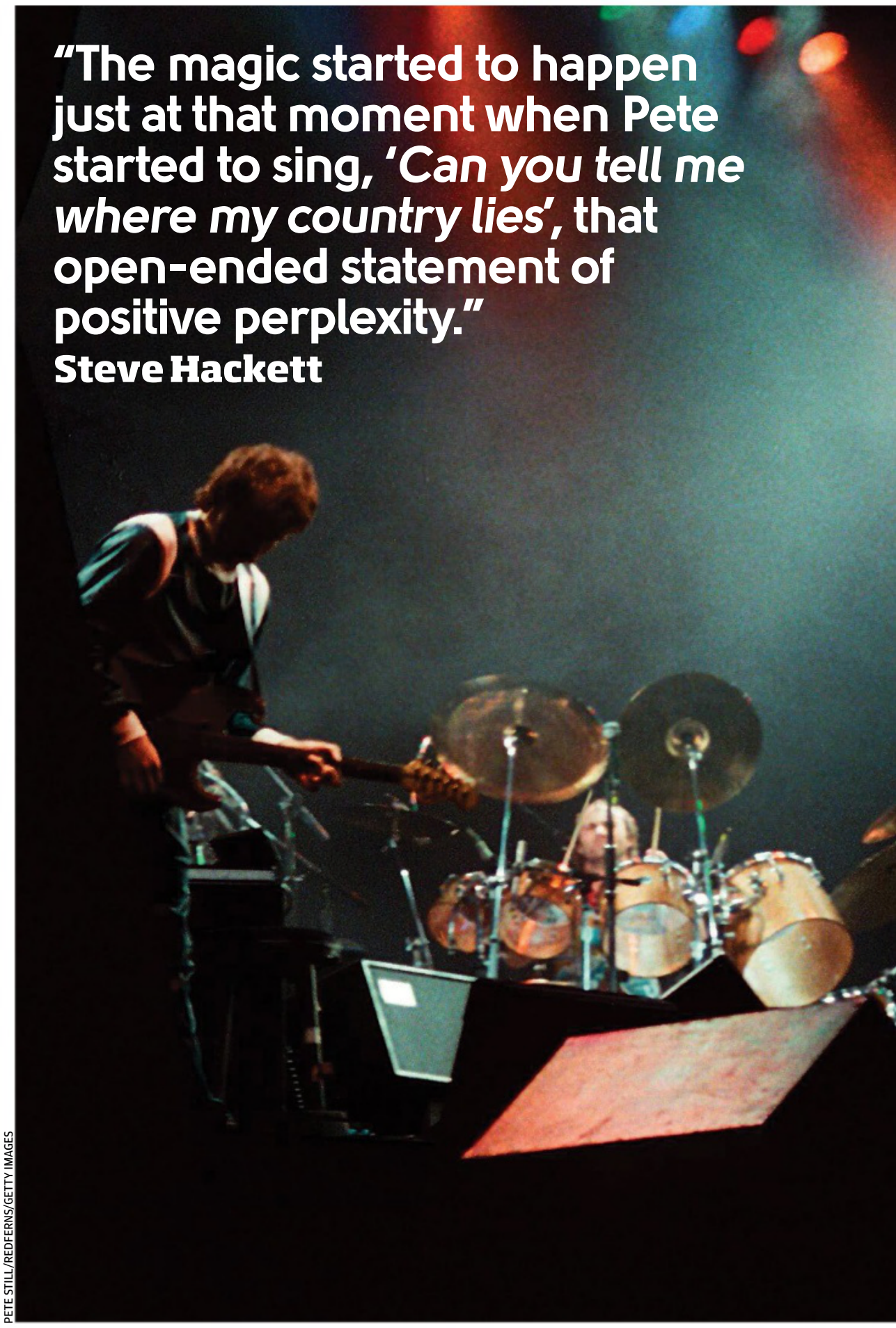
Peter Gabriel: Tony Smith and my old band Genesis very generously offered to do a benefit concert to pay off the debts, for which I'll always be grateful.

Phil Collins: Whether or not he felt he needed our help to get himself out of trouble, it made sense to us, and it was certainly not a condescending gesture.

Mike Rutherford: It seemed like a pretty obvious thing to do… the problem was logistics.

Tony Banks: People had been asking us to organise some sort of get-together for years and years and this seemed a very good reason to do it.

Advert in *Sounds* for Six Of The Best.



"The magic started to happen just at that moment when Pete started to sing, '*Can you tell me where my country lies*', that open-ended statement of positive perplexity."
Steve Hackett

PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Chester Thompson: They were all good friends to the point where they said, "Let's do this."

ALL THOSE NUMBERS GIVE ME GUIDANCE: THE ANNOUNCEMENT, THE REHEARSALS

When announced in the music press late that August, the old Genesis fans couldn't quite believe it. At £9 in advance or a tenner on the day (in the days when you could still 'walk up' to a big festival), it represented a huge bargain and an opportunity to see their heroes reunited. Fortunately, Genesis would be just at the closing stages of the UK leg of their Three Sides Live tour, so the machinery was up and running. Gabriel had spent most of the previous year recording the sound of his drainpipe being hit to go on his fourth album, and was about to tour himself.

Hugh Fielder: Both sides were keen to play down any reunion ballyhoo — which is why you didn't see the word Genesis mentioned anywhere in the publicity — because getting together again made little career sense for either of them.

Peter Gabriel: I think I will enjoy it but having tried for seven years to get away from the image of being ex-Genesis there's obviously a certain amount of stepping back. I don't think they would choose at this point to work with me or I with them but as they've offered, it's very generous. I'm very grateful and I'm intending to enjoy myself.

Steve Hackett: I was recording in Brazil at the time. I got the call, flew 3,000 miles from Rio to get back in time for a couple of numbers. I'd flown in mostly overnight on the red eye.

Daryl Stuermer, Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford and Peter Gabriel on stage at Six Of The Best.

Richard Macphail: I heard about the concert from Tony Smith. The timing was such that they were all geared up to go on the road. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been possible and all they did is stick a date on the end of the British tour.

Mike Rutherford: We've been learning the old songs on the bus between gigs on our British tour because we haven't got much time to rehearse them. They sound fine but I can't compare them to what we do now because it's another era. Genesis and Pete have gone in very different directions since we parted but that's irrelevant for an event like this.

Phil Collins: It's going to be strange getting back behind the drum kit full time again, but I'm looking forward to the challenge and I'm going on a crash course to adjust to my former role in the band. In fact, Pete was suggesting that we duet on *The Lamb*... but I said I'd prefer to stick behind the drums.

Peter Gabriel: I'm sure that, as with anyone reliving their youth, I'm going to feel a lot of nostalgia about the gig although in terms of career moves, it's probably not a very good idea for them or for me, but financially, it's going to be very useful for the WOMAD festival.

Tony Banks: I don't know if we can really live up to what people are expecting. What's strange is that the last tour we did with Pete playing *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* we were playing town halls and not even filling most of them but now there's an awful lot of people who want to hear it. I just hope they haven't built it up into something it can never be.

Phil Collins: We gathered at the Hammersmith Odeon one afternoon to run through some of the tunes. We were very under-rehearsed because we only spent a couple of afternoons working at it.

Steve Hackett: I rehearsed the previous afternoon at Hammersmith, where they were playing shows. I can't remember what time I got there. I would have done more, but that wasn't on offer.

Richard Macphail: Of course, I was keen to be there. It was very special. I really wasn't part of the camp at that time, or in the inner sanctum.

Simon Brenner: I always loved Peter Gabriel and early Genesis. But then [in the early 80s], everybody was quite uppity about music like that. Mark [Hollis, Talk Talk] was quite selective in who we were allowed to talk about. Bands had to be a bit more jazzy or a bit more radical.

LOST WITHIN THIS HALF-WORLD: OCTOBER 2, 1982

And so, 60,000 faithful fans travelled from all over the country, and some from around the globe, to witness this one-off spectacle at the Bowl "conveniently situated on the A5, two miles north of Bletchley". Parents dropped off their children, cheap chartered coaches arrived, trains emptied their loads at Milton Keynes Central for people to walk the mile to the site. The gates opened at noon, and the bill was rounded out by John Martyn, The Blues Band and Talk Talk.

David Buckley: My brother drove us down from Liverpool for the day. Genesis were massive in Liverpool — they appealed to working-class kids. Much as Pink Floyd did.

John Chadwick: We got our tickets through a company called Cavendish Travel, in our hometown of Sheffield. They sold coach and ticket packages to concerts all over the UK.

Gary Harries: There were a bunch of us, around 10 or 12. The father of one of our friends had recently bought one of those yellow Post Office Commer vans and he'd put bench seating in the back. We all piled in there and slowly made our way to Milton Keynes. The van was alight with everyone talking about what tracks they'd play and whether Hackett would make an appearance. Once in the queue by our gate, we spoke with the other fans that were there before us. To our amazement there

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were people from Italy and Canada along with British fans too.

Roger Morgan: Our first impressions of The Bowl were disappointing, to say the least! I had envisioned something akin to the Hollywood Bowl, not a grassy dip in a large field!

Richard Macphail: Milton Keynes was defined by the roads. It's almost like [North] America — you've got city blocks. And this was one of them quite on the outskirts, quite far from the centre. It was all done by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, who were, coincidentally, quite instrumental in the development of energy efficiency and housing, which became my second career.

Gary Harries: We arrived the night before and made our way to the entrance gate on our ticket. We slept overnight in the cold and damp to try and get an advantageous position once the gates opened.

Simon Brenner: It was like one of those European football stadiums that's slightly too big for what it's doing.

Kev Mellotron: I took my place around 50 yards from stage. Never moved from that spot all day, not even for the loo!

Roger Morgan: We stood there slowly sinking, soaked to the skin near front-left of the stage. We used to get to the front back then.

David Buckley: Our mum decided that a piece of her homemade fruitcake was enough to sustain us for the entire day.

Richard Macphail: It's [been] a long time since I'd seen a lot of those people. There were some roadies from both the Gabriel camp and the Genesis camp. It was a reunion in many senses of the word.

Simon Brenner: We got out of the car and we went to this caravan. We had a stylist at that time, and they wanted to put us in something white. I've read recently that it was because they wanted to make us look like *A Clockwork Orange*. We looked like a right bunch, and the floor of the caravan was already covered in mud.

Gary Harries: John Martyn opened proceedings at just after two. He was promoting *Well Kept Secret* at the time. He had a band with him and as the opener had a lot on his hands. I thought he did a grand job but he's not to everyone's taste.

ALAN PERRY

A flower! Peter Gabriel was back!

Roger Morgan: I liked John Martyn through his association with Phil Collins and hoped Phil would join him on drums. Sadly, he didn't.

Simon Brenner: Everybody was too far away, except for this mass of people in the middle.

Gary Harries: The Blues Band didn't really know how to approach the devoted prog audience.

Kev Mellotron: I had seen The Blues Band before. They did what it said on the tin — 12-bar blues expertly played. I remember Paul Jones asking if there were any Tories in the audience.

Richard Macphail: Paul Jones had this briefcase of harmonicas, all in different keys. I was impressed. That's the thing with the harmonica, you've got to use the one that the key of the song is in. Perhaps that's why harmonicas and prog don't really go together, because they're changing keys all the time. Because of the likes of Tony Banks!

David Buckley: We just sat in the rain through Paul Jones' blues.

Gary Harries: Talk Talk didn't stand a chance.

PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

It was a chaotic show, but beloved in fans' memories.

Simon Brenner: We were togged up in our whites, and then we had to go through what was like the Somme to get to the stage. It was not near, and it was pouring. By the time we got there, we were muddy, wet; it was fucking horrible. We looked out and there's this massive bloody great crowd.

David Buckley: When Talk Talk came on, I just saw this barrage of cans and bottles — like a wave of arrows at Agincourt — an incredibly hostile reception. It actually put me off Genesis fans.

Simon Brenner: I don't remember much from 40 years ago, but I totally remember a sea of faces of miserable wet men just hating us.

Kev Mellotron: Talk Talk were given a hard time unjustly, in my opinion. I thought they were quite good.

Simon Brenner: They announced we were coming on. And there was nothing. We finally came on in our whites. People started booing and jeering.

John Chadwick: It was still very early in their career and they sounded like Duran Duran.

Simon Brenner: Mark was very good at many things, but communicating with audiences was not one of them. He said something like, "Hello, are you alright?", and everybody replied, "Fuck off!"

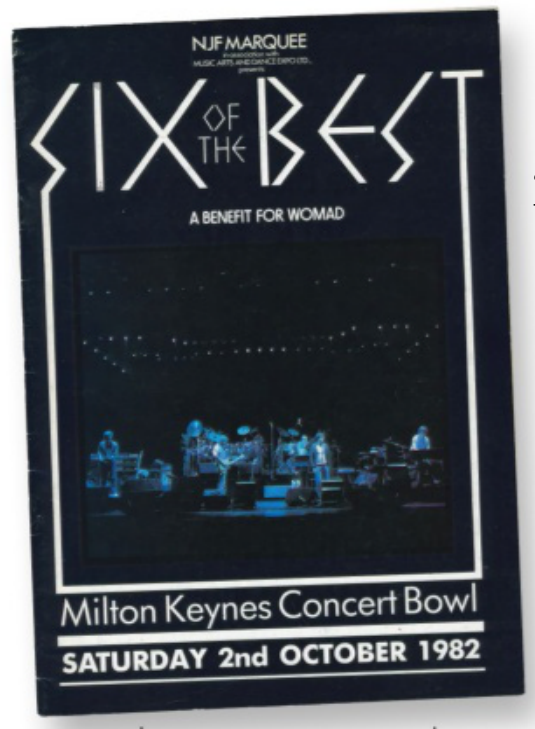
John Chadwick: They seemed out of place on the day.

Simon Brenner: We started off with the track *Today*, and very soon things started landing on the stage — mud and bags of god-knows-what. And the main game became, "Can we hit the keyboards?"

David Buckley: The fans seemed totally resistant to anything that could loosely be called 'pop' and were obviously prejudiced against the synth — which is ironic, as Tony Banks had been using one since 1973.

Simon Brenner: We did six tracks. Somebody hit the keyboard with something and there was a huge cheer. We finished and we were shell shocked.

Richard Macphail: I was backstage until Genesis went on. I saw Toto arrive. These two limos pulled up with these very groovy-looking people and then suddenly among them all was [journalist and photographer] Armando Gallo. I went over and we had a hug. As I remember [actor and Steve Porcaro's then-girlfriend] Rosanna Arquette was the only girl there.



The programme cover.

PROGRAMME COVER: PHOT COURTESY OF GEORGE GERMAN

Simon Brenner: We were cold, wet and miserable. Nobody talked very much. We thought we would be able to get a hot drink. We went into a tent that had the catering for Genesis. We asked if we could have a cup of tea; they told us to fuck off — we weren't allowed to use Genesis' mugs or something like that.

"We all smiled when the coffin came on. It was like, 'That's our Pete!'"
Mike Rutherford

A tale of two frontmen: Gabriel and Collins.

PETE STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THE CAPTAIN LEADS HIS DANCE ON THROUGH THE NIGHT: SIX OF THE BEST

After all that, at around 6pm, five of the six — Tony Banks, Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford, Chester Thompson and Daryl Stuermer — finally took to the stage. The sixth member, as ever, took a different approach. Almost 10 years to the day after he'd appeared onstage in a dress wearing the head of a fox without telling his bandmates, he was still up to his old tricks.

Kev Mellotron: Four pallbearers appeared with a white coffin, which they placed centre stage. Out emerged Peter Gabriel in his black leather jacket. Rael was back!

David Buckley: Peter Gabriel coming onstage in a coffin was so funny and so perfect.

Gary Harries: The opening of it all was, and still is, the most dramatic and sensational start to a gig I have ever witnessed. To be brought on to the stage in a coffin to the opening of *Back In NYC* was unbearable for the fans. When the top of the coffin came off and Peter Gabriel rose from out of it dressed as Rael, the crowd were absolutely stunned. Nobody had given it a thought that he might be 'in character' right from the off, maybe the old man mask might come out or the flower later, but to see him

rise was an incredible moment and still gives me goosebumps.

Mike Rutherford: We all smiled when the coffin came on. It was like, "That's our Pete!"

Phil Collins: If he had told us he was thinking of coming on in a coffin we would probably have said, "Is that really the best thing?" But he did it and it was funny.

Daryl Stuermer: These pallbearers brought him out and I don't think any of us knew that was going to happen. Then they put the coffin down and it was like he came back from the dead… It was a lot of fun.

Simon Brenner: I remember hearing Genesis being introduced and start up. We went home in the rain. As I'd got up really early, I got home, had a cup of tea and went to bed.

Peter Gabriel (onstage): Some of you may be wondering what we're doing here. But actually, this is a sequence from a previous event by the name of WOMAD… a great event that lost a pile of money. But I'm very lucky to have a group of people [here] who support these ideals, so in return for your cash we'll give you what we think you will like from this combination.

audience, and that was the cool thing, as they were all singing louder than Peter. It was very special.

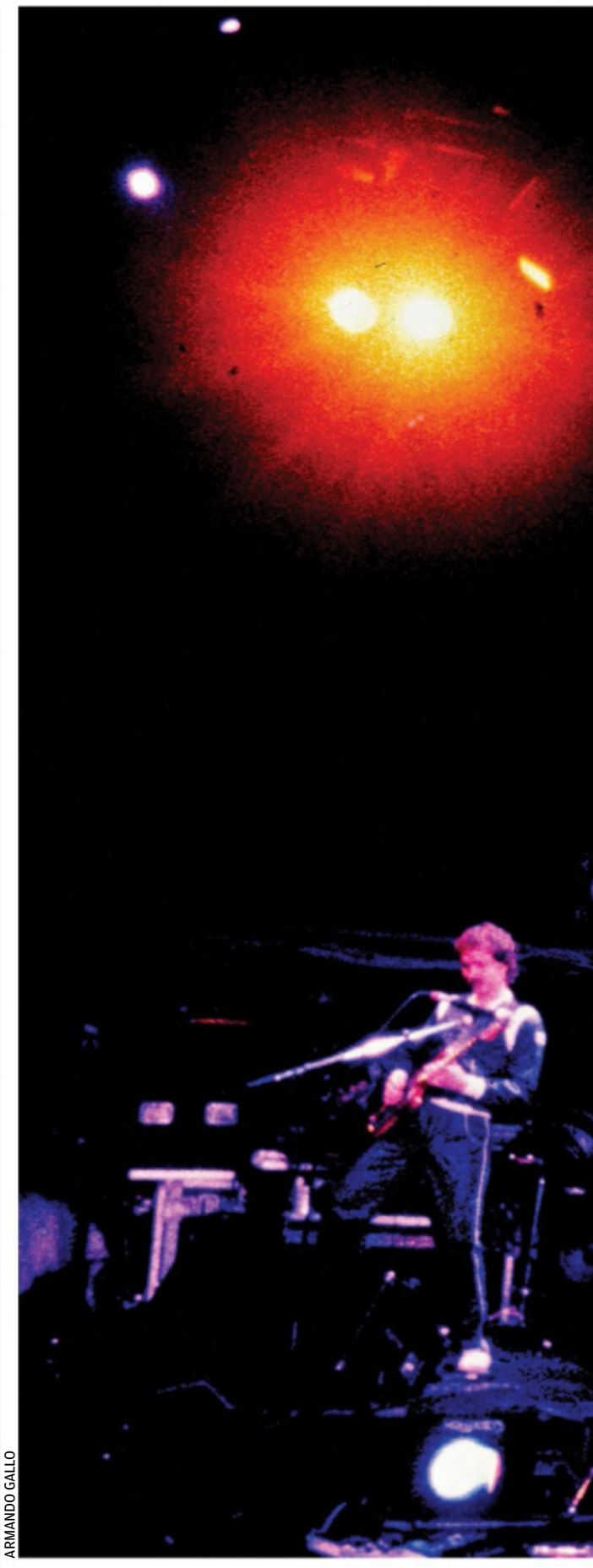
Mike Rutherford: It felt good. It was my birthday.

Steve Hackett: I watched the concert from the wings, and I thought it was very emotional. It was as packed backstage as it was onstage. The magic started to happen just at that moment when Pete started to sing, *'Can you tell me where my country lies'*, that open-ended statement of positive perplexity.

Tony Banks: I was wearing a tracksuit that had 'kamikaze' written on it, which underlined my attitude. It was odd, and not as good musically as we had been used to. There were moments when Pete went on to the second drum kit for *Turn It On Again*, but he couldn't keep time because he didn't realise that there was an extra beat in it. It was quite amusing, really.

Hugh Fielder: For nigh on two hours everyone revelled in the pre-1974 glories of Genesis brought up-to-date by the mammoth resources of the 1982 Genesis sound and light show.

Peter Gabriel: It felt a warm occasion, there was a nice feeling up on stage.



ARMANDO GALLO

"There were moments when Pete went on to the second drum kit for *Turn It On Again* but he couldn't keep time because he didn't realise that there was an extra beat in it. It was quite amusing really."

Tony Banks

Chester Thompson: The vibe was great.

Richard Macphail: Yes, there were very good vibes.

Kev Mellotron: Peter was dashing around, forgetting his words!

Gary Harries: It was amazing. There were tracks where Peter had forgotten the words and he was leaning in toward us, gesturing with his hands and encouraging people to help him remember.

Richard Macphail: I was at the mixing desk, where Craig Schertz [*1950-2002, known as 'The Chief' — Mixing Ed.*] from Showco Inc. was looking after the sound. I was in the middle of the

Kev Mellotron: It was tremendously emotional, but rather under-rehearsed. It didn't grab me as much as I thought it would. I had seen The Lamb… tour seven years earlier!

Richard Macphail: It was spotty. Not surprisingly.

David Buckley: I remember Tony Banks' otherwise smooth and effortless playing was slightly off-beam as his fingers were so cold.

Phil Collins: It all came flooding back: falling over things, pulling microphone leads out of sockets… it was chaos.

Chester Thompson: They set up mics around the stage where he said

he was going to be. Come the day of the show, Peter was wherever he was at the moment, which wasn't where he said he'd be the day before.

Hugh Fielder: Gabriel's ability to dominate the proceedings was quite astounding. He had remembered the words — which was just as well because the audience had too even though many of them [could] never have seen the two of them together before — and adopted the frontman role in the band with an ease and confidence that must have surprised even Genesis themselves. He had even resurrected the flower mask for *Supper's Ready* and taken time out to remember the story on the cover of the group's first live album as well.

Roger Morgan: Gabriel singing *Supper's Ready*! Rael was *Back In NYC*! Rain, what rain?

Gary Harries: I think the entire place must have lost their voices when they sang the closing part of *Supper's Ready*.

Richard Macphail: It was the old stuff that meant the most to me too; broken record. Peter was in good voice, I remember that. It was great to see him and Phil, working side by side, so well. It was deeply special.

Kev Mellotron: There was a tremendous roar when Steve came on.

Daryl Stuermer: I knew he was there. It's funny. A lot of times I'm reading YouTube comments and people always pit me and Steve against each other. They'll say, "I think Steve is better" or they'll say, "I think Daryl is better."

Steve Hackett: I'd met Daryl before. He was a very nice guy, and obviously a great player.

Daryl Stuermer: What's funny is that I get along with Steve really well. I think he's an excellent guitar player. It's funny that people are trying to make out that we're enemies.

Steve Hackett: It was a great memory for all sorts of reasons, a very proud moment and very emotional for me.

John Chadwick: It was an utter delight to see Steve. To see the five of them back together was just wonderful.

The gang's all here! Steve Hackett came on for the encore.

Roger Morgan: When Steve came on for the encores, he was met with loud roars and applause and shouts of, "Where have you been?" and, "You're late!" (Mostly from me!)

Steve Hackett: I was touched that there was a big roar from the crowd when I came on to play the encore. It was the complete team, as far as it was possible, at that point. Not to forget, obviously, my predecessor, Anthony Phillips, of tremendous importance to the band's development and success. They were big shoes to fill when I first joined.

Tony Stratton-Smith: Tonight, I looked at one aspect of my work [between 1970 and 1982] and, Pepys-style, 'found it pleasing'. The

reunion for this one night of Genesis, Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett was a happy success, and the members of the band revealed more emotion than one thought they possessed.

AFTER THE ORDEAL

By 8.30pm, it was all over. As it was highly unlikely all these people would be in the same place again for a considerable time, no one was in a hurry to leave.

Richard Macphail: You know what it's like with a festival with a big crowd. You either drop everything and do a runner and get out before the crowd, or you just hang back and have a party. Because of the nature of the event, there was no way that anyone was doing a runner; so we all just hung backstage in a drippy sort of marquee.

Mike Rutherford: These things are always so surreal, they go by so fast and before you know it, the event is over. Your mind is so taxed with trying to get the parts right, you miss what's going on.

Peter Gabriel: It was a bit like going to school when you haven't been there for 30 years; in this case it was only six years, but it still felt like a lifetime.

Tony Banks: It felt like a bit of a dream. I was very glad when it was over because I hadn't particularly enjoyed playing that stuff at the time.

Richard Macphail: Everyone was on good form, there were about 50 people backstage. It was Mike's birthday, and there was a birthday cake. That's where Peter laid eyes on Rosanna [Arquette, with whom he would later enter into a relationship] and the rest is history.

Tony Stratton-Smith: Mike's birthday [...] gave an additional excuse for much hugging and reminiscence. This was but the continuation of a party spirit effervescing earlier from 60,000 people enduring six hours of incessant rain, and maybe they deserved the biggest hug of all.

Steve Hackett: Strat was standing there on his own, looking like a very lonely man, having a cup of tea at the last remaining hot dog stand or whatever it was. We both stood there in the rain. We said what a marvellous evening it had been. We'd been close back in the day; I spent a lot of time with him. It was lovely to see him.

Richard Macphail: I only just sort of waved at Strat. I didn't have a chance to chat — that would have been the last time I saw him.

Hugh Fielder: If this had been the opening night of a reunion tour the inquest would probably still be going on over how to improve things as it probably fell some way short of Genesis and Gabriel's standards of perfection.

Steve Hackett: I got riotously drunk afterwards. I have to say everyone was. It was such a party, such a vibe. I think I was literally carried out of the place at the end of it; a combination of the excitement, jetlag and one bottle of pop too many. It was an extraordinary thing. By the end of it, we were all out of our brains hugging each other, as emotional as a Genesis team can get.

Richard Macphail: I don't remember people being very drunk, but I was driving so I don't recall a drop of alcohol passing my lips all day. But it was a very jolly atmosphere, a unique event in the annals of Genesis. On the other hand, it had been a very long day, and I was quite keen to get away as soon as was practicable into the roundabouts of Milton Keynes.

The review in the Afterglow fanzine.

AFTERGLOW

Allegedly never filmed or recorded professionally, the show remains an exceptionally fond memory that achieved its aims. Albeit one that triggers tremors of trench foot.

Mike Rutherford: I regret it now, but I was not keen to record the show.

Richard Macphail: I'm really glad I went. It was a memorable, historic day. It just brought joy to my heart to hear the crowd all singing along.

Gary Harries: People were soaked to the skin but seemed to be in a state of mind that dismissed all of that as they had just witnessed something amazing.

Kev Mellotron: So glad I was there... The atmosphere was extraordinary!

A family affair: Steve Hackett, Peter Gabriel, Tony Smith, Mike Rutherford, Phil Collins, Tony Banks and Daryl Stuermer with their offspring.

Roger Morgan: Damn that apocalypse weather, sludge and mud. We witnessed what once was and briefly what was again!

Gary Harries: We travelled home soaked to the skin and cold in the back of that van but a happier bunch of fans you would be hard pressed to find.

Tony Banks: That show did go some way to sorting out Peter's financial problem; now WOMAD is a monster thing.

Phil Collins: Importantly, we've helped stop our mate being jailed, or worse.

Steve Hackett: It was lovely to be involved, and lovely to do it for Pete and WOMAD. Everyone came together for all the right reasons:

AFTERGLOW FANZINE: AFTERGLOW ARCHIVE FACEBOOK GROUP

ARMANDO GALLO

it wasn't about the precision of the night, it was the spirit of it that was so important

Peter Gabriel: Although they are often portrayed as very unhip, exploitative

"They were all good friends to the point where they said, 'Let's do this.'"
Chester Thompson

capitalist men of the rock world, it's entirely down to them [Genesis] that the WOMAD movement can move, or struggle, or crawl forward, and they didn't get anything out of it.

Steve Hackett: I think loads of people caught colds and flu after that, because if you didn't have an umbrella, you were literally sunk.

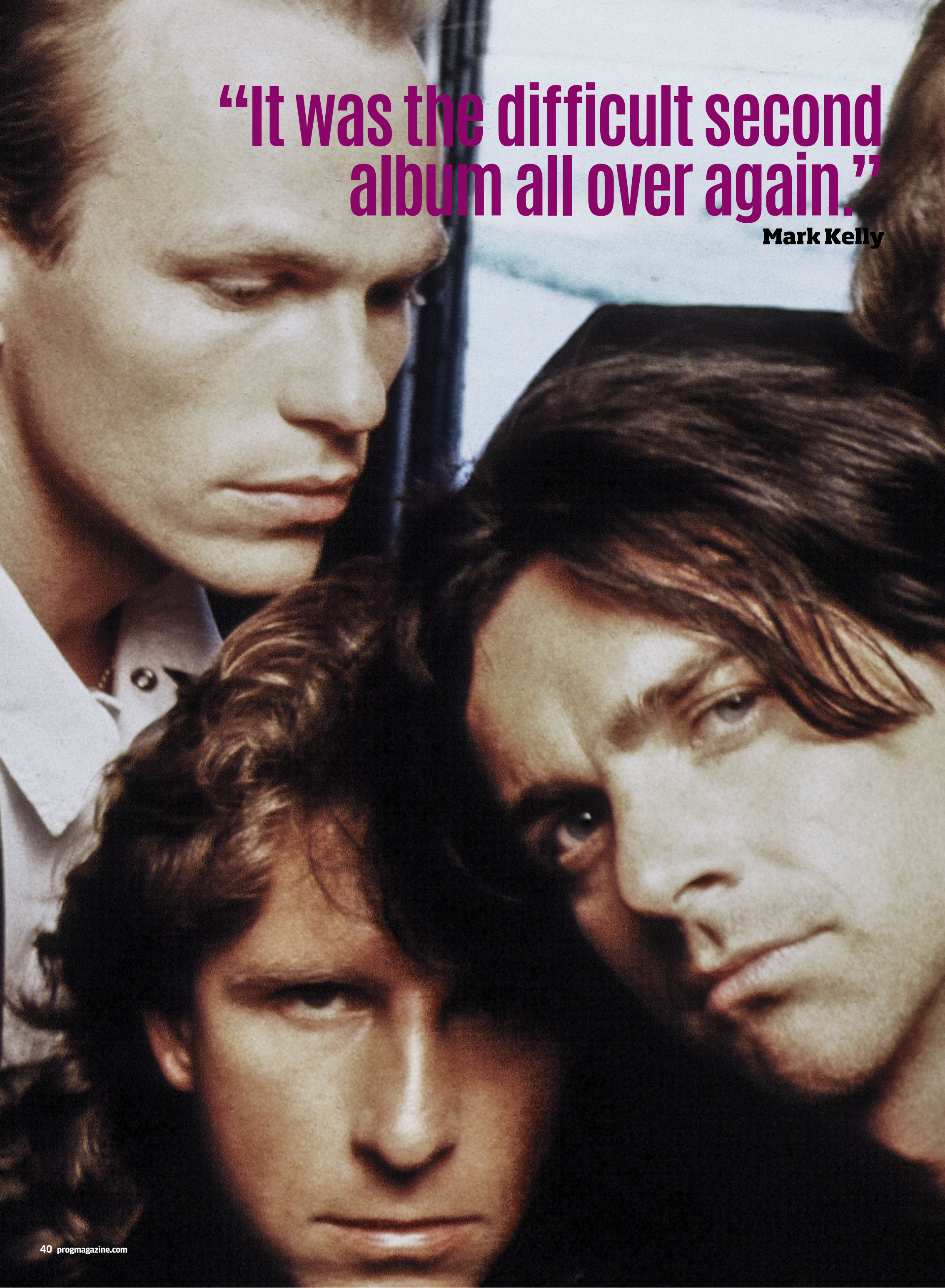
David Buckley: I was off school for the week as I got bronchitis from the cold and wet.

Gary Harries: Six Of The Best is without doubt the best gig I have ever been to and the fact that the friends I went with make a point of speaking to each other on October 2 every year is a tribute to that.

Forty years later, like so many things in the history of Genesis, Six Of The Best all seems so fantastical, it's another 'did-it-really-happen?' moment in their storied career. Happen it did, a last stop off before all parties moved to another level of fame and/or success. The scale of their collective talent was underlined by the fact that four years after this concert, both Genesis and Peter Gabriel enjoyed US No.1 hit singles, and their wayward son, Steve Hackett – himself in that US Top 50 with the group GTR – went on to enjoy a globally successful solo career.

Musically, and meteorologically, Six Of The Best may not have been the best day out, but its impact can be felt to this day. In 2022, WOMAD celebrated its 40th anniversary, Genesis retired from the concert stage after a fantastically successful and much-delayed tour, Hackett burns the Genesis flame with his bi-annual Genesis Revisited tours and releases... and Peter Gabriel? He's about to issue his eighth solo album, some 21 years since his last.

See www.genesis-music.com and www.hackettsongs.com for more.



“It was the difficult second album all over again.”

Mark Kelly

Waiting To Happen

It was their second album with vocalist Steve Hogarth, but **Marillion**'s *Holidays In Eden* was far from an easy ride. Originally released in 1991 and recently reissued as a deluxe package, the band's sixth studio release found them struggling to replicate the commercial success they'd enjoyed in the 80s without compromising themselves artistically. Hogarth, Mark Kelly and Pete Trewavas look back on the challenges of creating their 'pop' album.

The Rake's Progress: Dave Everley **Portrait:** Paul Cox

The tipping point for Marillion came with 'Mexican Night'. It was late summer in 1990, and the band had spent several increasingly frustrating weeks holed up in Stanbridge Farm Studios, a residential facility outside the English seaside resort of Brighton, attempting to write their second album with new singer Steve 'H' Hogarth.

The breezy mood surrounding the band as they entered Stanbridge had evaporated as the weeks dragged on. Marillion's unhurried, jam-based approach to songwriting clashed with Hogarth's more traditional modus operandi. Tensions were rising, and the atmosphere was getting fractious.

"No one hit anyone else, but we did have a few words," says bassist Pete Trewavas. "Steve was getting pissed off: 'What's the point of me being here?' I suppose he was also trying to stake his claim on where he would fit in the band."

Then came Mexican Night. The plan was for the band and their lyricist, John Helmer, to get together in Stanbridge, deck themselves out in 'bandido'-style fancy dress and stuff themselves with Mexican food in an attempt to alleviate the tedium and ease the pressure. It wasn't the first themed night they'd had, and none of them had worked. The omens weren't good for this one either: there had been a row earlier in the day.

The party's over? Marillion struggled to find their place in the early 90s.

"There was a bit of an ugly atmosphere and none of us wanted to be there, but there was no getting out of it," says keyboard player Mark Kelly. "Then someone discovered there were magic mushrooms growing in the field outside, which we naturally took. We had a great time. It was a good bonding experience. Everybody felt much better about things after that."

The slog wasn't over for Marillion, though; they still had an album to write. But that psilocybin-fuelled dinner felt like the point where they turned a corner.

The album that emerged from that frequently tortuous period, *Holidays In Eden*, remains an outlier in Marillion's back catalogue. It was the sound of a band who had reluctantly acceded to their record label EMI's desire to make a 'pop' record in order to boost their career. It failed in that respect, yet as the current reissue of the album shows, it acted as a crucial stepping stone between what Marillion were and what they would become.

"What I love about *Holidays In Eden* is that it sounded like a proper, polished album to me," says Steve Hogarth. "I'd waited all my life to be involved in something proper and polished."

Hogarth had replaced original singer Fish in 1989 after the latter's acrimonious departure. His entrance into Marillion had been smoother than he had anticipated. "The Seasons End tour had been successful, the response from fans was incredible and we were getting on well," he remembers. "I was expecting some kickback, but I didn't really experience it."

There was just one issue, though. The band's longtime label, EMI, were concerned about what Mark Kelly calls "a downward trajectory sales-wise". EMI made it very clear they wanted Marillion's new album to feature three hit singles.

"They were thinking, 'Well, what are we doing with this band? And more to the point, what's this band doing for us?'" says Trewavas. "If we didn't have another big hit soon, the writing would be on the wall."

"We were prepared to give it a go," adds Kelly. "The biggest problem was that we weren't very good at writing hit singles."

That may have been the biggest problem, but they were about to encounter another unforeseen one. Some of the music that ended up on *Seasons End* had pre-dated Hogarth's arrival, while the singer brought his own ideas to the table for the album. But now they were effectively starting from scratch. "It was the difficult second album all over again," says Kelly with a sigh.

The deluxe edition of *Holidays In Eden* is out now.

The band entered Stanbridge in mid-1990 with a blank page. It was a reflection of their mood that they were paying someone just to be on hand if they needed booze or cigarettes fetching from the nearest shop. "We went in there in a good frame of mind," says Hogarth. "It was our intention to go there for two or three weeks. And we went in there in June and came out in December."

Initially, the band knew what they wanted — or at least what they didn't want. "There were certain things that Steve H didn't want to revisit from Marillion's past, and certain things we didn't want to revisit either," says Trewavas. "We wanted it to be a clean slate, and for the band to move on."

Still, there were some reservations about just how far they wanted to move on. "I think certain members of the band were becoming increasingly scared that this new guy was going to start pulling them in the direction of pop music," says Hogarth.

Musically, Marillion's songwriting process was relaxed at best. When they weren't playing pool or drinking, Kelly, Trewavas, guitarist Steve Rothery and drummer Ian Mosley got together to jam then try to find ways of fitting together the bits that they liked. The pragmatic Hogarth preferred to construct songs: verse, chorus, middle eight.

"It became apparent where each party was coming from and it was completely different," says Kelly. "You've got H going, 'Let's work hard, let's put the hours in.' At the other end, you've got Steve Rothery going, 'I don't really feel it today, I'll wait for inspiration to strike.' You can't knock either method, because both work, just not necessarily at the same time."

"Everybody had a sort of an agenda that I wasn't party to," says Hogarth. "It wasn't really about songwriting, it was about doing their thing and getting their musical reward. I couldn't just grab their ideas and go, 'Look, I can finish this song, I just need the middle eight and it's done.'"

That didn't lessen the singer's growing restlessness. "I think he found it more frustrating working with us than we did working with him," says Kelly. "We were sitting around, drinking and playing pool, and he was just pulling his hair out: 'What the fuck have I joined here? I just want to get on and make an album.'"

Mexican Night went some way to dispelling the agitation within the band, though Hogarth and his bandmates remained at a creative impasse. Eventually, it was suggested that the singer take a break from the studio to focus on writing lyrics while the others attempted to come up with some solid songs.

"I was sent home!" says Hogarth. "Looking back on it, I totally get it, but I was slightly hurt by it at the time. I felt excluded."

The temporary separation helped to a degree. The singer returned a fortnight later with a set of revised lyrics, as well the foundation for *The Party*, the album's vividly moody third track. His bandmates hadn't been idle, repurposing unused music they'd come up with during their very last session with Fish for eventual album closer *100 Nights*. Conversely, the band had been working on the song *Holidays In Eden* when Hogarth left. When he returned, they still hadn't finished it. The creative breakthrough they needed remained elusive.

"There wasn't a breakthrough at all," says Hogarth. "There was just a feeling of, 'Well, we'd better just stay here until something happens.' It was a kind of process of attrition."

The band's A&R man, Nick Gatfield, was watching the costs of the album escalate with nothing to show for it. Gatfield, onetime sax player with Dexys Midnight Runners, announced that he would come to Stanbridge to check out progress. "He said, 'Maybe I could see if I can help anywhere,'" recalls Trewavas. "We were, like, 'Okay, what does that mean? Does that mean you're interfering with what we're doing? We didn't really like that.'"

Despite the band's reservations, Gatfield did have some constructive input. He pinpointed a track they'd been working on, the breezy love song *No One Can*, as a potential single — one of the three hits EMI had asked for.

"It had a nice guitar and keyboard figure, some nice sounding chords, and Steve put a great melody over it," says Trewavas. "And the label was thinking, 'Oh, this sounds

RAY PALMER ARCHIVE/ICONICPIX

"The label were thinking, 'Oh, this sounds very of the times, this could be pop music.' Of course, that's the last thing we wanted."

Pete Trewavas

Marillion in 1991.
L-R: Steve Rothery, Mark Kelly, Steve Hogarth, Ian Mosley, Pete Trewavas.

very of the times, this could be pop music.' Of course, that's the last thing we wanted."

In the end, Marillion themselves realised they needed to call a halt to the interminable songwriting process and actually start recording these songs. "I think it was Ian who said, 'We're not paying for any more of this nonsense,'" recalls Trewavas.

With their lengthy stay at Stanbridge finally over, the band decamped to The Moles Club, a venue-come-studio in Bath, where they demoed the music they'd been working on. A trio of fanclub gigs at Moles in December 1990, under the name The Low-Fat Yoghurts, even saw them giving an airing to a handful of new songs, including *No One Can*, *Waiting To Happen* and a version of *Splintering Heart* with an intro that was gnarlier and more guitar-heavy than the one that would eventually open the album.

Marillion's plans to record the album with Chris Kimsey, who had produced their twin commercial highpoints *Misplaced Childhood* and *Clutching At Straws*, were thwarted by the Rolling Stones, who insisted Kimsey work on their live album, *Flashpoint*. Instead, when the band entered Hook End Manor in Oxfordshire in early 1991, it was with Christopher Neil, whose credits included Sheena Easton, Shakin' Stevens and, more recently, Celine Dion. But it was the presence of Mike + The Mechanics on Neil's CV that convinced EMI, if not Marillion, that he was the man for the job.

"I think the label thought, 'Which prog rockers have had pop hits? Oh, Mike Rutherford. If we can do a Mike + The Mechanics with Marillion, we'll have hits and get on the radio and make a lot of money,'" says Hogarth.

Neil himself played a blinder when convincing the band that he was the man for the job. The producer told Marillion that his son was a big fan of theirs. "He said, 'If I fuck you up, he'll never forgive me,'" says Hogarth. "I'm not sure if it was true or not, but that was the line that got him the gig, really."

"Chris Neil reassured us that he wasn't going to turn us into a pop band," says Kelly. "And then proceeded to attempt to do it. I don't blame him. That was his brief from the record label."

Neil was a personable character, and the band got on well with him, even if his production sensibilities were only marginally less at odds with Marillion's than Hogarth's approach to songwriting had been. Neil was a studio pragmatist. His priority was to get a solid backing for the songs above all else. That wasn't how the band were used to operating.

"I liked to experiment with sounds and textures on my keyboards, to give myself different options," says Kelly. "But he had no time for it. I'd play something and he'd say, 'No, that's fine.' And I'm thinking, 'Actually, not for me it isn't.'"

Marillion still only had one of the three singles EMI had insisted on, though Neil had a ready-made solution. He suggested they record a version of *Dry Land*, the title track from the one and only album from Hogarth's pre-Marillion band How We Live.

"I'm not sure how he came across it, but he came pre-armed with the idea that we should cover it," says Hogarth, who describes *Dry Land* as "a song about sexual tension rather than unrequited love — that feeling that perhaps something could happen with this person, but neither of you are going to say it."

The new version retained the original's structure and airy melody, though Marillion added their own character to it. However Steve Rothery, in particular, wasn't comfortable with covering another band's song. "Steve doesn't like playing other people's parts, and that song was based around a particular guitar pattern, a set of chords played in a specific way," says Kelly. "But he put his stamp on, especially the solo."

It was Neil, too, who came up with the idea for the third of the required triumvirate of potential hits. Rothery had played an echoey, U2-esque style guitar figure during one of the jamming sessions at Stanbridge, over which Hogarth sang lyrics from an unreleased How We Live track titled *Simon's Car*, inspired by suave 60s TV presenter Simon Dee and featuring period-piece references to Sandie Shaw, David Hockney and The Avengers' Emma Peel, among others. "It ended up on tape somewhere, and Chris heard it and loved it," says Hogarth of the rough song.

Hogarth dialled back the explicit 60s iconography, turning the song into a hymn to an idealised woman: '*She's like the girl in the picture that he couldn't afford.*' Crucially, though, he kept the original opening lines and initial vocal melody: '*Cover my eyes/The light falls on her face.*'

Neil had another suggestion. The band should take another song fragment — essentially Hogarth intoning a swooping '*Hey*' — and merge it with the first part. The band titled the finished song *Cover My Eyes (Pain And Heaven)*, even if the final version found Hogarth stretching the three-word subtitle over nine notes. Still, in the eyes of the producer, they had their three 'hits', although certain members of Marillion remain sceptical as to its merits. "We were stuck for time," says Mark Kelly. "We needed a single."

Cover My Eyes (Pain And Heaven) was released as the first single from *Holidays In Eden* on May 28, 1991, three weeks ahead of the album itself. Longtime fans were mildly perplexed by its unfamiliar, poppier sound, and the song peaked at No.34 in the UK charts — disappointing but far from catastrophic.

The next single, *No One Can*, was a safer bet. This soft-centred ballad had true crossover potential. It entered the charts at No.36, but began picking up radio airplay. EMI capitalised on this positive state of affairs by promptly diverting its promotional budget to Vanilla Ice's latest single, *Satisfaction*. "And it flopped without trace!" says Mark Kelly of the US rapper's track.

That didn't help Marillion. Realising their error, the label re-redirected their budget to *No One Can*, but it was too late. Radio stations had moved on to something else. "I was hurt that *No One Can* wasn't a huge hit," says Steve Hogarth. "It still sounds like one to me."

"It was our intention to go [into the studio] for two or three weeks. And we went in there in June and came out in December."

Steve Hogarth

No one can, but Marillion did! PAUL COX

Holidays In Eden itself was received with a degree of suspicion by longtime Marillion fans on its release in June 1991. They were unhappy with the pop leanings of *No One Can*, third and final single *Dry Land* and *Waiting To Happen*, and the apparent lack of anything resembling the band's knotty, proggy old sound. But the naysayers overlooked the likes of dramatic opening track *Splintering Heart* and the closing mini-suite consisting of *This Town*, *The Rakes Progress* and *100 Nights*, both of which pointed towards the complex, atmospheric songs the band would produce in subsequent years. And it wasn't like Marillion had never written a 'pop' song before anyway.

"*Kayleigh* wasn't dissimilar to other things that were around in the charts at that time," says Trewavas. "But because it was wrapped in this bigger concept, people forget that it was a nice little pop song."

Although it peaked at No.7 in the UK chart, *Holidays In Eden* failed to arrest the downward commercial trajectory of Marillion's recent albums. Live, the band's pulling power wasn't what it was either — a show at London's Wembley Arena was curtained off halfway due to underwhelming ticket sales.

"It didn't meet the label's expectations," admits Mark Kelly of *Holidays In Eden*. "But we did our bit — we delivered the album the record company wanted. If nothing else, it convinced us that, actually, we're not a pop band. Trying to write hit singles isn't for us."

That would be borne out by Marillion's next album, *Brave*, a record that was as intricate and opaque as its predecessor was glossy and straightforward. It was, says Pete Trewavas, a direct reaction to their experiences of making *Holidays In Eden*.

"One of the criticisms of *Holidays In Eden* isn't that it's too commercial, it's that some of the songs lack a bit of depth. It doesn't have the little bits of detail that some of our other albums have. That's why, with *Brave*, we decided to rebalance that and have as much stuff in there as humanly possible." *Brave* itself would fare even worse commercially than *Holidays In Eden*, though it successfully corrected the band's drift pop-wards, at least in the eyes of their die-hard fans.

Today, Marillion look back on their sixth album with a detached fondness. Mark Kelly still loves *Splintering Heart* and *100 Nights*. "*This Town* and *Cover My Eyes* not so much," he says.

Steve Hogarth says he likes the album, though it's "tainted" by the arduous process of making: "Putting the head of a horse on the body of a camel," as he puts it.

"To some extent, EMI fucked it up," claims the singer. "But looking back, I'm glad they did. Because if we'd had a huge hit with *No One Can*, that would have pigeonholed us in a place where we wouldn't have been very comfortable at all, it would probably have eventually split the band up. And that would have meant that an awful lot of good music we wrote after that would never have been written, which would have been a shame."

The deluxe reissue of Holidays In Eden is out now via Parlophone. See www.marillion.com for more.

Black Moon

Since she emerged on the post-rock scene in 2019, British singer-songwriter **AA Williams** has defied expectations and followed her own path. Whether that's through performing with experimental Japanese group MONO, reworking her debut EP with a 10-piece string ensemble, or giving Radiohead's *Creep* a haunting makeover. *Prog* catches up with her to discuss her reflective second album, *As The Moon Rests*, and staying sane.

Words: Dannii Leivers **Images:** Thomas Williams

On March 23, 2020, AA Williams uploaded a video to her YouTube channel. Shot in moody black and white at her London home, the musician sat at her piano and performed a skeletal cover of Radiohead's *Creep*, silhouetted against the pale light coming through her curtains. It was the first in a series of covers the singer-songwriter uploaded to social media in the early stages of lockdown, putting her own glacial, neo-classical spin on songs requested by her fans, including The Cure's *Lovesong*, *Into My Arms* by Nick Cave and Deftones' *Be Quiet And Drive (Far Away)*. Looking back, she says the project, which eventually became 2021's album, *Songs From Isolation*, gave her "something to do that wasn't staring at the news and being upset at everything that was happening.

"There were people like, 'Hey! Do Cult Of Luna. Hey, do Amenra'," she laughs, of the suggestions she had to veto. "How?! Let's look at the situation here: we've got a piano, me, a guitar and a microphone. I spent ages trying to make *Space Oddity* work and I just couldn't. One day I'm going to crack it."

Today, Williams is speaking to *Prog* over Zoom from the same London flat where she filmed those videos, only this time, the curtains are open and the room blazes with sunlight. It's a sharp contrast with the album we're here to talk about: her excellent second proper full-length release, *As The Moon Rests*; a dark, tranquil and dense record that she describes as a battle against lifelong anxieties and an acceptance that "there is no ultimate perfection."

"Just existing as a human being is uncomfortable," she explains in her calm, quiet manner. "Sometimes I joke I'd be better off as a brain in a jar. Like in science fiction films; just a little brain with a vocoder in a laboratory. It's hard being a person."

"Once you've gone full strings you can't go back! You can't be going and putting a little synthesiser on and pretending, you've got to go full whack."

It cements her reputation as an artist with a masterful command of emotion, texture and space. A trained pianist and cellist, her ethereal, cathartic 2019 self-titled EP, which saw her merge classical music with soul, post-rock and the heaviness of metal, garnered rave reviews and things quickly gathered pace. Her debut live performance took place at the prestigious Roadburn Festival, followed by a headline show at London's Southbank Centre and tours with Cult Of Luna and Sisters Of Mercy. The pandemic, which hit four months before the release of her melancholic, insular debut, *Forever Blue*, could easily have scuppered that momentum. Instead, the album's quiet soul searching proved the perfect soundtrack for the claustrophobia of the lockdown.

As a self-confessed lifelong introvert, Williams was built to withstand the pandemic. Holed up in her apartment with her husband and bassist, Thomas, and their long-haired dachshund, Geezer (named after Black Sabbath's bassist Geezer Butler), she kept busy throughout lockdown. The *Songs From Isolation* project was followed by *Arco*, an "academic exercise" that saw her strip back the material on her debut EP and rework it with only haunting strings and vocals, alongside a group of trusted musicians, The Mayfield Ensemble. Having played all the string parts of *Forever Blue* herself, on *Arco* she wrote the arrangements for the

A work in progress: AA Williams.

"Just existing as a human being is uncomfortable. Sometimes I joke I'd be better off as a brain in a jar. Like in science fiction films; just a little brain with a vocoder in a laboratory. It's hard being a person."

10-piece ensemble, a responsibility that carried over to new album, *As The Moon Rests*. "Once you've gone full strings you can't go back!" she insists. "You can't be going and putting a little synthesiser on and pretending, you've got to go full whack."

The pandemic "gifted" her time to work on *As The Moon Rests*, removing the pressure cooker of touring and record company deadlines. "Everything was a good three, four times the length of time I spent on it when I did *Forever Blue*. It was nice to have room to manoeuvre, a case of seeing where the journey takes you."

It's allowed for the experimentation evident in the "earphone candy" listeners can pick out during the new record's colossal but detailed walls of sound and the hushed intimacy of its more vulnerable moments. "There are all these insular, tiny, introverted little bits dotted around the production," she says. "Once you notice them then you'll notice them poking out every time."

Thematically, *As The Moon Rests* picks up where *Forever Blue* left off, exploring the darkest, anxiety-ridden corners of the human psyche. While work on demos and instrumentation took place at her flat, she honed the lyrics in her local Caffè Nero before moving to the studio to record. "The moment they opened coffee shops again it was a dream. I would go down, pop my headphones on and work on lyrics every day for weeks and weeks."

On the cinematic single, *Evaporate*, a song about wanting to disintegrate into invisibility, amid luscious instrumentation and thick, gothic riffs, she sings: *'I can't stop the violence in my mind, everyday I try just to survive,'* later summarising, *'Harm myself is all I do.'* But the album does let in some light, something that was missing among the bruised shades of *Forever Blue*. On the sparkling *Pristine*, she sings, *'I hide my scars well/I'll try/This time I'll be better than before.'* Later, over gentle, minimalist strings on *Shallow Water*, she hopes that *'one day the frost will thaw and come and comfort me/Misery is only one part of me.'*

"This record is a little less insular and a little more confident," she confirms, referring to her perennial tendencies to pick at the bones of her own fragile self-confidence. "There's a little more self-assurance and a little bit more of an affirmation of an unconditional relationship with one's self. It's less looking in and saying, 'This is a problem, this is a problem, fix this, fix that.' We're all a work in progress. None of us are complete and finished but I think it's possible to make positive steps without making huge leaps and bounds. Trying to make a few little steps every now and then does sometimes pay off."

She purges a slew of emotions across the album's 11 tracks, recognising your relationship with yourself is one of the most important relationships you'll ever have. The powerful title track was the first song written.

"It turned it into this epic love song and I felt like there was nowhere else to put it but to close the record because I couldn't think of how to follow it. Not all of the songs are like it, there's a lot to unpick in there but the song, for me, is about an unconditional bond between people. It doesn't have to be a romantic bond, just a bond between two people that doesn't waver and is solid and its possible to have that with oneself as well."

Even so, Williams recognises that feeling comfortable in one's skin isn't something that happens overnight, instead, it takes work, building slowly over years. "It's still certainly not an equal playing field in the mind of AA Williams," she concludes. "But every now and then, there's a little glimmer of something, even if it's not an obvious glimmer of optimism. Being human is tough. I don't enjoy it sometimes. I can't remove myself from the situation, I'm not a brain in the jar."

With *As The Moon Rests* though, she's unlocked a kindness within herself, towards herself; a self-understanding and forgiveness that wasn't there before.

"The album for me is not a case of having found the light all of a sudden then it's all brilliant," she says. "It's a case of occasionally trying to step in that direction for my own good and for my own sanity. I'll take that and run with it and if I can make a few more steps in the right direction, great. If I can't, then that's fine too."

The moon rests, but AA Williams, it seems, does not.

As The Moon Rests is out now via Bella Union. See www.aawilliamsmusic.com for more information.

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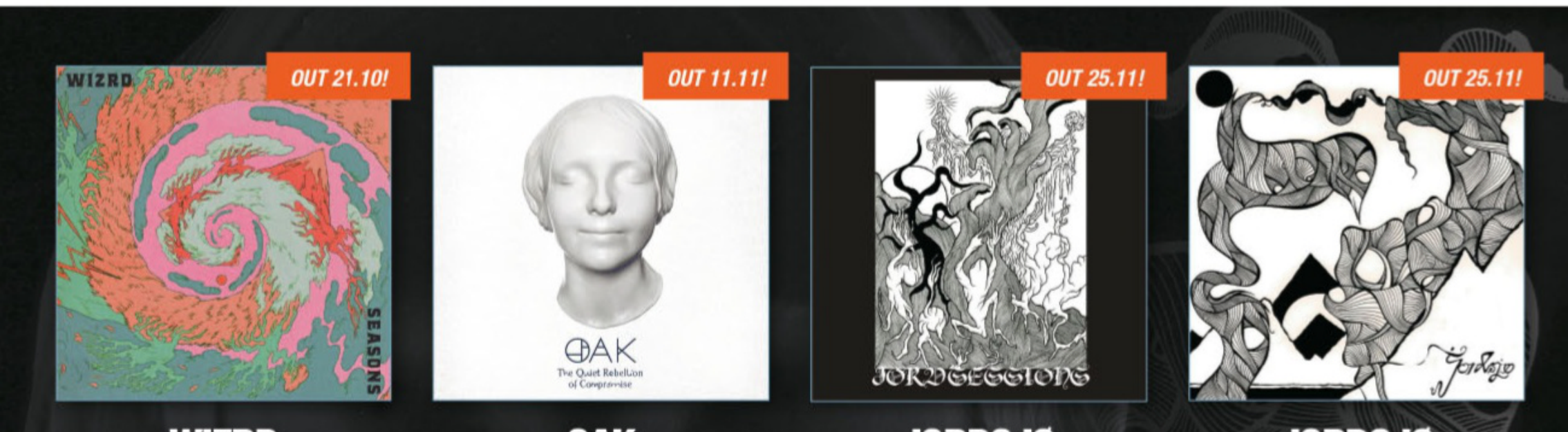

WIZRD
SEASONS

WIZRD is a Norwegian rock band that dips its toes in all kinds of genres. From rock and indie to jazz and prog, WIZRD knows all the rules but deliberately breaks them. "Seasons" is a groovy, catchy and progressive masterclass, with beautiful vocal harmonies, awesome melodies, quirky jazz grooves and a rock'n'roll drive to die for. With members from Spidergawd, Krokofant, Soft Ffog, Megalodon Collective.

OAK
THE QUIET REBELLION OF COMPROMISE

"The Quiet Rebellion of Compromise" is the most dynamic Oak album so far, with a wide range of influences showing through, with some sharper edges and some surprising twists and turns. For inspiration, Oak uses everything from classical music and impressionism to movie soundtracksand prog-rock. No wonder Oak really doesn't sound like anything else.

JORDSJØ
JORD SESSIONS

The "Jord" album is finally available again with a totally new mix and some added recordings. Out on limited edition gatefold red vinyl, and the CD version includes the "Nattfiolen Suite".

JORDSJØ
NATTFIOLEN SUITE

While recording their second full-length album "Nattfiolen" they recorded more material than necessary – and they decided to not include the title track because of how long it was. Finally, it's out on a special limited edition 10-inch record, on gold vinyl.

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All God's Children

"It's really nice to be in a band that doesn't just sound like another band. It has its drawbacks, of course, but overall we've been pretty lucky."

King's X have described it as "the most enjoyable album" they've recorded to date and *Three Sides Of One* serves as a reminder that the trio have no plans to pack up their instruments. Despite having had a challenging few years, bassist and frontman Dug Pinnick tells *Prog* why the time was right to make a bold return with their first new material in 14 years.

Words: Dave Ling **Images:** Mark Weiss

With drummer Jerry Gaskill suffering a pair of near-fatal heart attacks and guitarist Ty Tabor developing an unspecified illness that required "vigilant monitoring", causing the second axing of a visit to Europe and the UK, the past few years represented a tumultuous era in the history of King's X. Bassist and frontman Dug Pinnick, too, was twice hospitalised. On top of everything else, the idiosyncratic Texas-based trio were forced to delay entering the studio after a big fall-out with a record label. Don't forget to throw in a pandemic that devastated the world of music. However, despite their previous album, *XV*, being released as long ago as 2008, Dug Pinnick insists that there was never any possibility of King's X dropping quietly off the map.

"No," he scoffs affably. "My issue was just a hernia. Jerry had two heart attacks but they didn't cause him to be disabled. He's probably healthier than any of us right now. Ty has an immune problem that the doctors are trying to deal with. So we

L-R: Jerry Gaskill, Dug Pinnick, Ty Tabor.

didn't think about throwing in the towel just yet, but it's going to happen sooner or later. At almost 72, I'm realising that there are things I won't be able to do forever, such as singing *Over My Head*, or something."

Since settling upon the name back in 1985 (though the trio had worked together for longer), King's X have carved a defiant though less than meteoric path, despite the magazine covers and ticker tape welcome that greeted their fabulous debut, *Out Of The Silent Planet*, in '88. Their 13th album, *Three Sides Of One* is a statement of solidarity from a group that continues to wield a massive influence without reaping the financial rewards. This is something King's X have had to learn to live with.

A lifelong fan of the genre, Pinnick — who cites *Close To The Edge* by Yes as a record that changed his life — is very pleased to be talking to *Prog* once again.

"As a musician I love the time changes and the space for ideas that progressive rock opens up," he grins. "There was something about Yes: the way that Jon Anderson and Chris Squire came up with those amazing, beautiful harmonies and beneath all of that they would be playing such complicated music. Those key elements never detracted from the other. For some bands that was too much of a battle, but Yes had a knack of making it work. *Close To The Edge*... what an amazing 18 minutes of music that was; and you never got bored. I would play it to my friends and they would say, 'Oh my God, that is so great.' And these were people that didn't listen to music a lot. To me, *Roundabout* is still one of my all-time favourite pieces of music. It's a template for the way I write my own songs."

Does Pinnick consider King's X a prog band?

"No," he fires back, smiling. "King's X is a rock band. We dabble in all sorts of avenues, from gospel to blues, rock and prog. From show tunes to classical. We've never been able to add a label to our name and I don't think we ever will. One of our songs could be based on two chords and the next is a magnum opus. It all depends upon how we are feeling."

Some might suggest that the very uniqueness of King's X renders them progressive? Pinnock considers the question for a moment before replying: "Yeaaaah. It's really nice to be in a band that doesn't just sound like another band. It has its drawbacks, of course, but overall we've been pretty lucky."

All the same, the bass player is proud of his belief that nobody successfully cloned King's X.

"I've heard similarities — but subtle ones," he laughs. "When we began drop D tuning back in '88, nobody else was doing that," he explains. "Van Halen and Killing Joke did songs in that tuning but their bass players never did. Eighty per cent of our first album, *Out Of The Silent Planet*, was drop D and it led to a whole different approach on the guitar. After we did that, the grunge generation followed suit — in fact, the whole world did. Alice In Chains were doing the same thing as us, but in a more primitive way that really appealed to the masses.

"You know, somebody from another band once told me: 'You can take one chorus from a King's X song and make it into a whole new genre'," he adds with a chuckle. "I thought that was very cool.

"But answering your question, even when others try [to sound like us], they don't [manage it]," Pinnick adds. "There's something about the three of us. We play on each other's nuances. It's not just notes; it's about how we blend our emotions. When people hear that, it's special."

Despite the inclusion of lyrics such as, *'Is this the end of the world/Or a new beginning'* (from its opening track *Let It Rain*), *Three Sides Of One* was written and recorded though not mixed before the pandemic. The band used the Emmy Award-winning Michael Parnin, who had previously worked with Pinnick on his 2007 solo set *Strum Sum Up* and also on a Jimi Hendrix tribute album, as producer.

"I've known Michael for more than 20 years and asking him to do the record was a great marriage from the very start," Pinnick enthuses. "He got us, and we liked him."

***Three Sides Of One* is out now.**

Pinnick alone brought 27 songs to the session, with Tabor and Gaskill submitting their own compositions, before whittling them down to the final dozen. "Our prognosis was that every song had to be recorded to make it sound like a single," the bassist explains. "People don't listen to albums like they once did, so some songs have a lot of bass, others drums, and *Take The Time* was mixed for Top 40 radio."

Pinnick's *Give It Up*, in which mentions the making of a will, is highly autobiographical. "I had just turned 70 when we started to make this record and those lyrics were an awakening for me," he explains. "That realisation now causes me to live in the moment."

Destined to become a stage favourite, *All God's Children* is a quintessentially King's X-stylised song written by Tabor about the puzzling duality of Christians with less than evangelical beliefs. As a gay man and an individual of faith, that hypocrisy is something Pinnick knows all about.

"Here in the US we've got the Christian nationalists, everything has split apart and it's become political," he sighs. "It's getting scary. It's all a big mess and I don't want anything to do with it other than to tell folks to wake up."

Elsewhere, Gaskill addresses his own advancing years with *She Called Me Home*, inspired by the drummer's multiple heart attacks. "For a while, Jerry thought that maybe he couldn't do this anymore," Pinnick confides. "And then his brother came along and told him, 'Get your shit together, go and make music' — and he did. We're a band that sometimes needs a kick in the ass."

Which brings us to the subject of taking 14 years between albums. If Pinnick and company are counting out time, do they feel bad about wasting so many precious moments?

Three sides to every story: after a 14-year break King's X were ready to lay down new material.

"At almost 72, I'm realising that there are things I won't be able to do forever, such as singing *Over My Head*, or something."

"Not at all," he fires right back. "In that time, I did Tres Mts with Jeff Ament and Mike McCready of Pearl Jam, three KXM albums with [ex-Dokken guitarist] George Lynch and Ray Luzier of Korn, two albums with Grinder Blues, my Hendrix tribute album [*Tribute To Jimi: Often Imitated But Never Duplicated*] and two solo albums. I've been busy, busy, busy. It's not my fault the other guys didn't want to make music."

So what has changed?

"The guys felt it was time. After making *Gretchen Goes to Nebraska* [1989], *Dogman* [1994] and all the rest, they were reluctant to make a record just for the sake of making a record. The last thing we wanted was to shit out crappy music for people to be disappointed."

Despite the announcement of a deal with the Australian label Golden Robot back in 2018, King's X have returned to their old home of InsideOut for *Three Sides Of One*. Pinnick isn't keen on raking over the details, commenting: "Some things happened, and they broke the contract in a way that made us say: 'This is not cool. We've got to go.' And we left." He adds: "We've known Thomas [Waber] at InsideOut for so long, they had signed us for two previous records, so it's like going back to family again."

A social media post from July 26 showed King's X rehearsing for the first time in two and a half years ahead of a trio of US shows. In it, Pinnick admitted to having a "panic attack", but the group's shared joy was obvious.

"Each of us was having panic attacks," he laughs. "The type where your stomach knots up and you wake up in the middle of the night afraid of not remembering the songs."

Getting back onstage was "horrifying", he laughs. "After all that had gone on we had no idea of whether we could do this individually, let alone as a band. I had had Covid, which forced me to rehearse at home alone. All of us were thinking about our age. It was like running a marathon after 15 years… without training. As a band, we have always played inside each other's heads and suddenly I was having to think about things like notes and timing, but it was like riding a bike and I'm happy to say that those days are over. We did three shows and after the second we said, 'Okay, we are starting to get warmed up. We can do this again. Now we're excited.'"

However, when asked how soon King's X might return to Europe, Pinnick can't be sure.

"I don't want to even make a prediction because we've let people down twice now," he replies. "When Ty's doctor gives the all-clear, that's when everything gets re-booked and not before. Individual gigs are okay, but going on tour is the problem. After flying, Ty needs a couple of days to recuperate. A tour of Europe is night after night and his immune system wouldn't hold up to that. Right now, we don't know when that situation might change. It's possible that he could have immune problems for the rest of his life, which would mean that we could only play at weekends every month."

With a shrug of the shoulders he concludes: "But you never know."

Three Sides Of One is out now via InsideOut. See www.kingsxrocks.com for more information.

Theory of evolution

With a new singer and a new album, the future looks bright for **Arena**. *Prog* catches up with co-founder member Clive Nolan and new vocalist Damian Wilson to hear more about their 10th record, *The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance*, and how they're finding a new lease of life nearly 30 years in.

Words: Chris Cope **Images:** Kylan Amos

During *Prog*'s chat with Arena about their latest album, *The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance*, new vocalist Damian Wilson veers the conversation towards the time he got pulled over by police for speeding at more than 100mph en route to sing at a Rick Wakeman gig. But there's a deeper meaning behind the slightly alarming anecdote: his experience at the subsequent court appearance reflects what he believes is the "secret to life", and also how feels about the future of Arena.

"I thought: Okay, it's going to cost me a lot of money, I'm going to lose my licence, it's going to be a disaster, so I'm going to go and enjoy it," Wilson says. "The judge, we had him laughing; we had fun, the whole court had fun. And when the judge came out at the end, he said, 'I don't believe the police', and that was it.

"That, to me, is the secret to life. You have got to enjoy every moment — even the bad moments, because they're not always going to be that bad. Being with Arena is the same thing. We should enjoy every second that we have."

With Wilson in tow, it's a new era in the long and celebrated history of the prog rock heavyweights and the injection of fresh blood only looks set to bolster the English quintet further.

The wonderfully titled new album, their first with Wilson behind the microphone since he joined in 2020, is much delayed — blame the C-word — but it's most definitely worth the wait.

"I actually think we've managed to produce a rather good album," keyboard player and founding member Clive Nolan says politely. "I know it's our job [to say that] in an interview like this, but there are times when the sum is greater than the whole, whatever that thing is. Somehow the album grows more than the parts that you put in."

As suggested by the grandiose title, listeners who get their kicks from concept records — especially those with a scientific tinge — will get their fill, and then some. Lyricist Nolan is the mastermind behind an elaborate story, conceived after a rather lengthy chat with a professor of physics in the US; his initial idea was about all matter disintegrating, but never disappearing — and the molecules travelling through time before reintegrating with another human.

"I thought he'd laugh me out of the bar, but he said, 'Ah, you're talking about the theory of molecular inheritance,'" Nolan says. "I said, 'Wow, that's the album title right there. I'm nicking that!' We talked for literally hours. My sort of little bit of sci-fi nonsense is of course complete nonsense. But in amongst all of that, there are some rather interesting and far more complex things than I'm able to explain, kind of physics

"Personally I think Damian's the singer we should have had from the very first day."

Clive Nolan

Arena: always evolving.

explanations for some of the elements of what I'm sort of prattling on about."

The theory manifests itself in the album through the story of a person showing the same traits and abilities as someone who went before them. A famed composer is involved in the fictional tale, too. The lengthiest track on the record clocks in at just under seven minutes — a vivid contrast to the 22-minute epic closer of their last album, 2018's *Double Vision* — but the songs are intended to be viewed as segments of a larger whole.

Musically, Nolan and Wilson are joined by the usual Arena backbone: ex-Marillion drummer Mick Pointer, prog busy bee John Mitchell on guitar and bassist Kylan Amos. Although the lyrical themes may be sourced from a scientific imaginarium, the music itself is easy to grab onto: it's hook-laden prog rock, occasionally emboldened with a harder edge that's sometimes floral, often theatrical. Lathering the vocals on top is the experienced Wilson. He joined following the departure of Paul Manzi, who had drifted apart from Arena. But there's certainly no animosity or hard feelings.

"He had other things that were going on in his life at the time, I think he had other commitments," Nolan explains. "And I just think it was time for him to move on. For me it was a relief because I had sort of seen it coming a little while beforehand, and I could tell that the writing was on the wall."

It's perhaps little surprise, though, that Wilson — whose bulging CV also includes work with Threshold, Ayreon and Headspace — was recruited, having nearly joined the band on a couple of occasions previously. He and Nolan go back to the early 1990s when they worked on a Landmarq record, and have been friends since.

"Personally I think Damian's the singer we should've had from the very first day," Nolan proclaims. "As far as I'm concerned, he has all that I want from a vocalist. That's not to detract from any of the other singers, they're all great in their own way, but this is what I was looking for. We've nearly asked him at various points, but the stars haven't quite aligned, until this time."

And how has it been for Wilson? "I love it," the vocalist says with a smile.

"There were a number of things that were essential to me. Number one is that I had Paul's blessing. I didn't want to be stepping into a role that had bad feeling or didn't have the blessing of the singer that had been there previously. Paul was fantastic about it. And the other thing is just creativity: being able to express myself without treading on other people in the band and being myself."

Arena also have a 25th anniversary tour scheduled in the UK and Europe this year. "I think there's a lot of respect within the band, and I just hope that by the time we get off that tour bus, there's still the same respect there," Wilson says with an impish laugh.

"When someone comes along like myself, and has their input, it will have its effect on the rest of the balance within the band."

Damian Wilson

But life on the road — and a bus — is certainly a factor behind why he accepted the offer. "One of the reasons that I wanted to join Arena was the fact that actually they are a tour bus band," Wilson explains. "They go on tour on a tour bus. I live in a van, so therefore it's home from home. I can do exactly the same as I do in my own van at home as I can in the tour bus. I can wander up and down the aisle naked, no one will make a fuss. It's exactly the same!"

***The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance* is out now.**

The live jaunt may be promoting a 25th anniversary, but the roots of Arena stem back further. The group formed in the mid-90s, with Nolan and Pointer the only two members remaining from the first line-up. The initial spark that led to Arena was rather inconspicuous: two fans in a fast food joint encouraged Pointer to try music again after leaving Marillion.

"We almost started by accident," Nolan says. "This all began because a couple of people, who wrote a fanzine, bumped into Mick Pointer in a McDonald's. Mick had been out of the music business for 10 years after leaving Marillion, and he was busy being a carpenter, making lots of

Arena, L-R: Kylan Amos, Mick Pointer, Damian Wilson, John Mitchell, Clive Nolan.

money doing kitchens and things. And then these guys bumped into him, and they said, 'Let's go to the pub, it would be great to have a proper chat.' So he agreed, and they went to the pub and they had an evening. They kind of got talking, and said, 'Why don't you do another album… we know this guy' — who was me — 'and he could do an album for you.'"

Just like that, Arena's first record, *Songs From The Lion's Cage*, was released in 1995, while *The Visitor*, from 1998, is regarded as a jewel in the crown. Their last — *Double Vision* — saw the light of day four years ago. The discography now stretches to 10 full-length studio albums, with a couple of handfuls of live releases and EPs to pad it out. Pretty good going for a band whose members have a smörgåsbord of side hustles.

"So far with Arena I think we've achieved an awful lot of the things that we've aimed to achieve," Nolan says. "The things that any band would tell you: we'd love to have more sales, more audience, of course. And this is the kind of stepping stone album that might allow us to do that. It might well do.

"Some albums lifted us up quicker - *The Visitor* was a classic example. That album just kind of captured people's attention, and it still does."

Speaking down the line on Zoom, Wilson is effervescent considering the night is quickly drawing in and it's something that doesn't go unnoticed. Says Nolan, somewhat more moderately, "You bring in someone like Damian and you're bringing in a new load of life."

The vocalist is ready to contribute, to do his own thing, to be his own man. It's perhaps telling that he has a music credit on each of the album's 11 tracks.

"The one thing I had told myself was that I wasn't going to join a band that had a number of different singers before me," Wilson says, "because the comparison thing is distracting to what you actually are trying to do. When you sing with Rick Wakeman, for example, all the old singers from Rick Wakeman, their names will always come up. The point is, you're not meant to be like Jon Anderson. You have to have your own stamp, you have to be expressing yourself. When someone comes along like myself, for example, and has their input, it will have its effect on the rest of the balance within the band."

Prior to this, Nolan and Pointer had conjured up a 'five album plan' at the start of their Arena career, mapping out each release and the group's upwards trajectory. Since reaching number five, the band have taken things album by album. It's likely, though, that *The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance* will be a shot in the arm to take them even further as they inch towards their 30th anniversary. In some ways, Arena are only just getting started.

"We weren't looking for an empty vessel," Nolan explains about recruiting their new vocalist. "We were looking for someone who could actually help to revive us a little bit. A band goes on for as long as we do, and it's the new blood that helps to get everybody else pumped up again. You almost need it every now and again."

The Theory Of Molecular Inheritance is out now via Verglas. For more information see www.arenaband.co.uk.

“I didn’t want to sing in character as if the album were a musical, but I wanted to get some of the fragility and tenderness of a 99-year-old man as he looks back on his life.”

The Post-War Dream

On Robin Armstrong’s ninth album as **Cosmograf**, he turns to the past in the hope of building a better future. The musician tells *Prog* about the fictional World War Two veteran at the heart of *Heroic Materials* and the music that inspired his tale.

Words: Stephen Lambe **Images:** Gravity Dream

"The first album was a demo that sort of escaped, really." *Prog* is reminiscing about the development of the Cosmograf project in the late 2000s with its sole creative force, the multi-talented Robin Armstrong. We're discussing 2009's *End Of Ecclesia*, though he also notes that there was an even earlier record that remains largely unheard called *Freed From The Anguish*, which, like his latest album *Heroic Materials*, has a World War Two theme.

Starting with 2011's much-praised *When Age Has Done Its Duty*, Armstrong slimmed down from a 'cast of thousands' to become something of a one-man band. "Some of that was a bit cynical," he admits, "I had seen other bands use this strategy of bringing in guests as a way of gaining press interest, so it seemed like a good way of getting credibility early on.

"But it went beyond that. I really started to enjoy giving them their parts and seeing what they came back with. Most often, it pushed the music in totally unexpected directions. I'm not averse to going back to that exciting approach, but over the last two or three albums, I've also enjoyed having that complete control and the speed of working that it gives. It really helped creatively to be able to get sketches down, and often those early ideas would end up on the album as the finished takes."

In particular, Armstrong has now become the main vocalist, both in the studio and when Cosmograf play live.

"I've developed a growing confidence in what I wanted to say vocally," he says. "I worked out that I didn't need to get other singers on board unless there was a particular song that needed a certain style of voice. At first, I worried that I was copying vocalists, but I've finally found my way through it artistically and found my style."

Hero worship: Robin Armstrong.

One of the benefits of the studio — particularly on *Heroic Materials* — is the ability to sing in different styles and to use vocal effects. Armstrong explains, "You might hear a Roger Waters-style delivery but then, in contrast, something with more effects in the way that Steven Wilson might do. But hopefully, I'm not being too derivative. I also liked the falsetto I was getting with my voice. I didn't want to sing in character as if the album were a musical, but I wanted to get some of the fragility and tenderness of a 99-year-old man as he looks back on his life."

Heroic Materials is certainly melancholic in tone, following on from the relatively up-tempo and rocky *Rattrapante*, released last year. Armstrong says that he doesn't like to repeat himself too much, despite melancholia being a feature of Cosmograf music. "I wanted to do something more laid-back and symphonic from the outset. So, I wanted to keep to that downbeat tone," he explains.

Props to Armstrong, it's a great album.

"I wanted to do something more laid-back and symphonic from the outset. So, I wanted to keep to that downbeat tone."

Another feature of the album is its brevity, at around 45 minutes. Again, there were practical considerations for this as well as artistic ones. "I wanted to put the album on a single vinyl LP," he explains, "so for practical reasons, it needed to be relatively short. But in the end, it worked fine, and I didn't have to make any creative compromises. I often see debates about album lengths on prog forums, and I've always been of the view that a record must be as long as it needs to be. However, there's also a concentration span issue, and 45 minutes does seem to be the sweet spot for that, especially as many of the tracks on this album segue into each other, making it unfriendly for radio play and streaming. So, I'm promoting this as very much an album experience."

***Heroic Materials* is out now.**

Nonetheless, he has plucked out one track to act as a promotional tool: *British Made*, which both works in the context of the album but also as a standalone track in that it celebrates the beauty and innovation of British engineering.

"Well, Floyd — even within these massive art concept albums they put together — always had one nugget you could pluck out," he explains. "So, it gave me the idea to use *British Made* as a little lead into the album."

Speaking of Pink Floyd, does he ever worry that people will think the album is too influenced by them? "It's a style I really enjoy and it's a great frame of reference. I'm not ashamed [of the similarities] at all, but some Cosmograf albums don't sound like them at all. Porcupine Tree are another big influence. A friend gave me *Fear Of A Blank Planet* and it blew my mind. That album was my way into that sound."

Despite the seemingly straightforward idea behind *British Made*, the album's theme is anything but simple and it reveals more layers on closer examination. "Each Cosmograf album has the presentation of its title and of what the concept appears to be, but there's always some duplicitous meaning, ambiguity or allegory there," he explains. "There's always more than meets the eye, so you look at the Spitfire on the cover and you think that this is a story about a World War Two veteran. But I saw it as a perfect metaphor for someone who couldn't really change. His life was defined by something that happened when he was 18 years old, and he spends the rest of his life coming to terms with that but also the world is changing around him while he's stuck in time. He also realises the human race is in danger of making life untenable on this planet. So, there's this climate change concept going on in parallel, and I thought that it was interesting to mix the two ideas together. Billy feels that he can't change but also knows that unless he does, there's no future for mankind. Of course, we are all dealing with these ideas; we have a nostalgia for the past, but we also recognise that we must move on if mankind is to progress."

While the album's main character — William 'Billy' May — is fictional, the inspiration comes from a factual source. "He's a composite, but largely based on Geoffrey Wellum, the famous Battle Of Britain veteran," Armstrong explains. "I pulled out a little of his story to understand what a typical Spitfire pilot would have been asked to do. But the pictures of a pilot you see in the album booklet are actually my son."

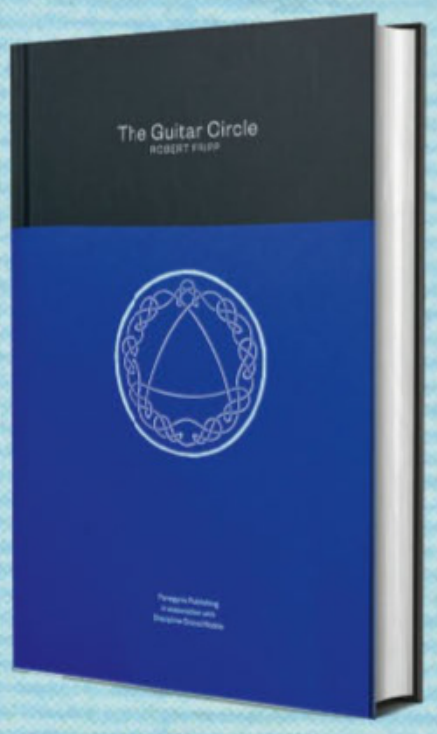
It's clear that the character of Billy has also been used to channel some of Armstrong's own views, particularly on the subjects of ecology and sustainability. "We're in danger of repeating the same mistakes," he says. "Although we are moving towards greener lifestyles, we're doing it in the wrong way. We are throwing increasing [amounts of] materials at EVs, but we're not really solving the problem. The album uses the example of the E-type Jaguar, lauded for its form and its beauty, but rather than cherish what we have, we're building electric cars with batteries that don't last long, so soon we'll quickly throw those out and replace them with newer models. It seems we still haven't beaten the idea of consumer need. If we put more effort into maintaining and sustaining what we have — thus *Heroic Materials* — we wouldn't be going down this path. That's what the song *The Same Stupid Mistake* is about, but I've also protected my own worries on this subject onto the character of Billy."

The album does end on a moment of promise, however, via the brief final track, *A Better World*. "At least there's a nugget of hope that we won't make the same mistake as Billy; we'll learn from our errors by looking inward and changing to build a better planet," Armstrong states. Let's hope he's right.

Heroic Materials is out now via Gravity Dream. See www.cosmograf.com for more information.

PANEGYRIC

the best of 2022



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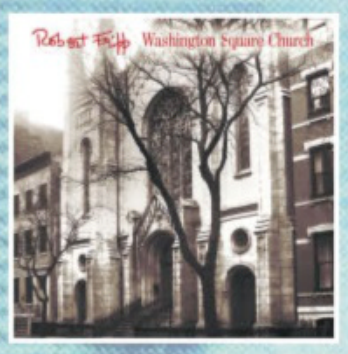

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Between The Lines

After much critical acclaim was heaped on their 2017 epic, *Legends Of The Shires*, prog metal exponents **Threshold** are back with their 12th studio album, the darkly brooding *Dividing Lines*. With tensions between bandmembers past and present now resolved, founding guitarist and producer Karl Groom sheds some light on the bleak themes it explores.

Words: Alison Reijman **Images:** Robert Burress

No more divisions: Threshold are back!

"It has ended up being more like *Subsurface*, which had elements of political commentary, talking about propaganda and censorship."

A revolving door's been in operation at Threshold HQ throughout the veteran prog metallers' 34-year history, most notably in the lead vocals department. The last revolution in 2017 saw singer Damian Wilson leave for the third time and the return of other erstwhile vocalist Glynn Morgan for their 11th studio album, the epic *Legends Of The Shires*.

Five years later, studio album number 12, *Dividing Lines*, was handed to the record company in January, heavy CD and vinyl pressing schedules delaying its release. The hold-up frustrated Karl Groom, Threshold's founder member and lead guitarist, who was hoping for a summer release. But, as he tells *Prog*, it's only because he's so happy with the finished result.

"I feel really confident about this album," Groom enthuses. "I love the sound we've got on the vocals and how the music on it has come together."

Billed as *Legends Of The Shires*' darker, moodier brother, *Dividing Lines* delivers 10 contrasting cautionary tales reflecting on a fractured world, its dissonance, discordance and strife. On it, Morgan re-establishes himself not just as an incisive vocalist and rhythm guitarist, but as composer of three of its hard-edged, immersive songs alongside Threshold's regular writing team of Groom and keyboard player Richard West.

"On *Legends…*, we worked on the idea of a country trying to find its way in the world with a dual theme of a person finding their place," Groom explains. "It wasn't intended to be a direct commentary on Brexit, but it did tie in with that in certain places. We didn't want to make it political in that way as that would be too divisive. However, it created a real buzz, and we toured a lot with it. That's probably the reason why, to some extent, we delayed writing this new album."

But the direction of creative travel was an issue early on. "At one point, we thought we were making *Legends*'… follow-up. There had been a real connection between us and the fans, something to which they really responded, and we thought it would be great to continue that," recalls Groom.

"Then it began to feel a bit contrived, and we thought, 'Hang on, we are kind of writing to order?' I've always had a cut-off point with previous albums in that if I had songs I liked but didn't put on the album, I would never use them again. This time, we thought, 'Let's just write the songs we want to write, assess where we are, see what fits and how those songs come together.'"

Groom saw a new theme developing as those songs evolved. "It has ended up being more like *Subsurface*, our seventh album released in 2004, which had elements of political commentary, talking about propaganda and censorship, which you can hear in the single *Silenced* that Richard wrote."

Silenced has since been translated into a hard-hitting video of a young boy pursued by a robotic enemy through woodland, which perfectly

frames West's lyrics, *'The shouting of a dream/Was nothing but a scream inside/ As everyone was silenced.'*

Groom explains, "People feel they're not being heard and are being closed off from society. It's very easy to find these themes due to the way things are going with populist governments all over the world. As Glynn was thinking along the same lines musically, it wasn't too difficult to put it together."

The album's title comes from a line in Morgan's climate catastrophe song, *Let It Burn*. "With this, Glynn was almost nodding back to our first album, *Wounded Land*, thinking about Mother Earth and mankind's path of destruction," Groom observes. "*Let It Burn*'s got more of a progressive element to it with a slower choral section at the end. He sent the demo through late on a Friday night when my wife and I usually sit down to really listen to music. This was the first song from Glynn, and she was interested in it too, especially when we thought it had finished, then that dramatic final ethereal section came in!"

The contributions from Morgan, originally the band's vocalist between 1993 and 1996, impressed Groom a lot.

"I was really pleased with the way in which Glynn has matured, as I was judging him from what he did in 1995 and thought he would be writing something like on [second studio album] *Psychedelicatessen* or a more metal influence. But he's developed so much as a lyricist and songwriter."

Morgan's wrathful *King Of Nothing* was chosen as the album's second single. Again, Groom was delighted. "This wasn't what I was expecting from Glynn. He has a style of writing which makes me smile every time I get a demo from him."

Sequencing was perhaps the most challenging part of *Dividing Line*'s development to achieve a balance between the differing moods and styles of the songs. *Haunted*, the full-on Threshold-minted rocker that opens the album, wasn't originally considered as the obvious curtain raiser.

L-R: Karl Groom, Steve Anderson, Glynn Morgan, Johanne James, Richard West.

"Richard and I were trying to structure the album but couldn't find the continuity, then suddenly, we juggled everything and *Haunted* came up on top," says Groom. "We really had to think about the dynamics as you can't put all the long songs together. In fact, the whole album was a difficult one to arrange compared to *Legends...*, where we could slot in the songs around the storyline.

"In the beginning, we wanted to split up the songs written by Glynn, and the ones that Richard and I wrote because ours morph into one in some ways and they sound like Threshold. We were not so sure what would happen with Glynn's, but we needn't have worried

because the whole thing really does sound homogeneous."

A third single, *Complex*, written by West and a particular favourite of Groom's, is due out on November 18 to coincide with the album's release date."This is a great song and a real commentary on life," he says. "There is a key change at the end which drops a semi-tone, which is really nice. Richard's wife, Farrah [League Of Lights], is a great singer so he gets her to sing the demos, such as on this track, then we will then adapt the vocals to suit us."

Despite a healthy batch of singles coming from the album, Groom is bemused about the current received wisdom to promote albums by drip-feeding individual songs, which he feels stunts some of the excitement surrounding new releases.

"The only thing I dislike about the way things have gone in music is what I call the lack of occasion," he declares. "When I was growing up, there was a record store in my local town, Egham [in Surrey]. I [would] walk down there and order, say, the new Genesis album, on the day it came out. People would be queuing and getting excited about the album, then would get together, meet in school, and talk about it. It was such a big deal back then!"

In tandem with Threshold's rock-steady riffs and strong melodies, Groom reveals there are one or two surprises on here, in particular *Hall Of Echoes*. "It's a very intimate song and the verses have almost a sort of Toto quality to them, which isn't normally someone we would have as an influence. The keyboards have that kind of intimate sound that they had during their mid-period."

Another significant track is West's *The Domino Effect*: "I don't know how he fitted so much into it. It's only about six and a half minutes in length with a long instrumental section, but it feels as though there's a heck of a lot going on in there in terms of a story. With its repeat choruses, it's a bit like the epic *The Man Who Saw Through Time* on *Legends Of The Shires*."

The theme of voicelessness in *Silenced* is revisited in *Lost Along The Way*, which is about being heard on the internet. "Pre-internet, people were happier before they had a voice because they were equal. Now it's very hard to censor or have rules because if you create rules, you penalise an area of society," Groom opines.

"[Glynn Morgan] has a style of writing which makes me smile every time I get a demo from him."

"I don't know how we get out of this rabbit hole. The internet brought so many positive things that you can't imagine being without it, but that negative element [of being voiceless] can really affect people badly. As a person with children, I constantly worry about these things."

Following *Lost Along The Way* is *Run*, a typical heavier track composed by Morgan, which Groom says really works alongside the thunderous, dramatic closer, *Defence Condition*.

"It's a matter of changing the colour between songs, then the dynamics, length of song and tempo. You have to get things right, so you don't get big jumps for no reason: instead, you get a gradual build. When you're a prog band with all these dynamics, you need to structure it carefully so you can listen to the whole album with tracks in the right order. It's like creating a play or novel."

Morgan's return has also enabled the band to slim down to a five-piece with drummer Johanne James and Steve Anderson on bass rather than their usual six-member line-up that had previously led to some simmering tensions within the ranks. Groom's happy that Threshold's alumni are friends again, notably Wilson, who's now fronting Arena, and former guitarist Pete Morten, but it wasn't always thus.

He recalls cryptically: "There was conflict, which may have started between Pete and Damian, but it alluded to a problem with the whole band. I recall it began with an innocuous irritation over towels, but when you're constantly touring and working together, it becomes bigger and bigger.

"We've managed to sort it all out now. Johanne and I did the drums for Pete on his new My Soliloquy album, *Fu3ion*. I've seen Damian several times recently and we're on good terms, while we were previously in a difficult situation when he wanted to move on and do something different."

Although, at time of press, they didn't have any live shows lined up, Groom is optimistic that Threshold will be in a position to resume touring again next year in Europe where their biggest fanbases are in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

"We haven't been abroad since October 2019. We probably play 20 dates in Europe a year but can't do it any longer. Our only gigs in the past two years have been in the UK — at the Shepherd's Bush Empire and the HRH Festival in Sheffield."

But, he warns, the UK government need to put a deal in place with the EU to safeguard British artists, musicians and technicians who want to work in Europe.

"I accept we've left the EU, but I don't want to be like an office worker going on tour, constantly checking documents, and getting everything stamped. We want to concentrate on making music."

Despite the current red tape around touring, their musical divisions and differences now behind them and *Dividing Lines* sees Threshold hitting new heights in moody prog metal magnificence.

Dividing Lines is out on November 18 via Nuclear Blast. See www.thresh.net for more information.

All The Rage

Forty-one years ago, **Ultravox** entered Conny Plank's studio in West Germany to record the follow-up to the hugely successful *Vienna*. They had no songs and no ideas, but over the course of several months, the experimental *Rage In Eden* began to take shape. Midge Ure, Billy Currie and Warren Cann reminisce over the creation of an album that not only reached the UK Top 5 but also earned them comparisons to Genesis!

Words: Jeremy Allen **Images:** Brian Aris and Trevor Keys

The song *Vienna* might have been held off the No.1 spot by a novelty song about a rebellious Italian boy, but its huge success gave Ultravox carte blanche to experiment for as long as it took with a bearlike German. Conny Plank, the éminence grise of krautrock, was rehired to oversee Ultravox's fifth studio album, and this time it would take more than three months to come to fruition at his converted pig farm in Wolperath, near Cologne. The band went into the studio with nothing, and opened themselves up to the whims of inspiration. The result of that gamble was 1981's *Rage In Eden* and, for Ultravox fans (of the new testament variety), it's the pinnacle of the band's creativity. Furthermore, it's a cornerstone of progressive pop, and became the inspiration for some of the more thoughtful art-pop made during the early to mid-80s.

"Weirdly, you've just done the impossible," says Midge Ure, calling from his Portuguese bolthole. "You've had me listening to one of my old albums." And how does it bear up 41 years later? "You tend to analyse anything that's old rather than listen to it for enjoyment," he says, "but at times, I'm thinking, 'Well, that was actually quite good!' We had all the sounds woven between each other at the end of various tunes. And it was a bit adventurous to do something like that straight after the success of something like *Vienna*."

The album *Vienna*, named after the hit single, hung around the UK charts for a year and a half and established Ultravox as a household name. Not bad for a band that came back from a self-financed North American tour broken in 1979, with two members having jumped ship. Moreover, Ultravox were a massive step up the credibility ladder for Ure, who'd dallied with success with the boy band Slik and then followed it up by fronting Glen Matlock's ill-fated Rich Kids. To

The new, deluxe edition of *Rage In Eden*.

Ultravox sought out strange new horizons.

"We weren't averse to slipping into a 7/4 time signature now and again ourselves, even if people consider us 4/4 guys."

Billy Currie

The man, the myth, the sideburns! Midge Ure.

Ultravox's Canadian drummer, Warren Cann.

risk all that so soon required a certain amount of sangfroid.

"When we did *Vienna*, we thought we had really made progress and we really were finding our identity," says Canadian drummer Warren Cann, "so we decided, okay, we might never get this opportunity again; we have a lot of good will, we have a lot of people liking what we're doing: let's really throw the dice, all or nothing. We're going to really stick our necks out and we'll either fail spectacularly or we'll succeed spectacularly. Or at worst, we'll think we've succeeded spectacularly but everybody else will be lukewarm about it."

third release, and while it didn't reach the top spot, it held No.2 for four weeks, won a Brit Award, and was voted the nation's favourite ever No.2 by BBC2 listeners in 2013 ahead of the Pogues' *Fairytale Of New York*. It all could have been very different if circumstances hadn't worked in their favour.

"Yeah, that was absolute luck," says Midge Ure. "It got two plays on [the BBC's] *Roundtable* or whatever it was, and it just resonated with people." Not unlike Kenny Everett famously giving the unconventional *Bohemian Rhapsody* a spin on his show, it created a groundswell that turned into a tidal wave.

record they were about to make: "He'd cut his teeth working with these visionary krautrock artists who weren't restrained by your three-minute pop requirements. And he was a big, big fan of Lee 'Scratch' Perry and he treated his mixing desk in much the same way, throwing echoes in and then chopping things up and experimenting, and not worrying about needles going into the red and distorting."

While recording in Wolperath, the members of the band lived outside in rented accommodation, and when they left the farm, artists like Can's Holger Czukay would turn up in the downtime to mix tapes, "doing his

"[Conny Plank] cut his teeth working with these visionary krautrock artists who weren't restrained by your three-minute pop requirements."

Midge Ure

"With *Vienna*, we had the luxury of writing and touring those songs before going into the studio, so the arrangements were all done," adds Midge Ure. "I mean, that's a massive part of any album, having it mapped out in your head. We hadn't got that with *Rage*... but we had the wherewithal."

Their label would no doubt have preferred a replication of the process that made Ultravox famous, but the band had leverage in terms of what they could do. Chrysalis hadn't even wanted to release *Vienna* without a radio edit. At Ultravox's insistence, the unexpurgated five-minute single eventually came out as the

The four men decamped to Germany in February 1981, and began working away with the studio as muse. Keyboard, viola and violin player Billy Currie remembers that the setup had changed since they were last at Conny's farm: "It was exciting because he'd updated his studio. He got success because we had success." The space in the barn had been rearranged with glass doors and windows, making it easier to see Plank working at his console in front of the band, instead of him tucked away in a wooden side room.

Midge Ure remembers Plank's wealth of experience being crucial to the expansive

album of shortwave noises and bits of radio stations stuck altogether [*On The Way To The Peak Of Normal*, 1981]," according to Midge Ure. Staying behind after school, Ultravox were inspired to play with the frequency of sounds on the title track, which goes from widescreen to compression, and then ends with the song crackling from a tiny transistor speaker.

Rage In Eden itself emerged from a sonic aberration, when the band got excited about some spooky backward singing on another track. "We were doing the chorus vocals on *I Remember (Death In The Afternoon)*, and you got this weird..." Ure starts singing and

London lad, bassist Chris Cross.

Billy Currie. Do not compare Ultravox to Genesis in front of this man.

gesticulating with his hand. "'*Daah daah daaah…*' it was fantastic, we loved it. And we put that onto another tape in reverse and then wrote an entire track around it and that became *Rage In Eden*. So it was that kind of inspiration where you hear something, or create something, and go off and build an entire piece of music around a sound or a feel or a drum loop."

Once these two tracks were underway, they were off to the races. Speaking of which, Billy Currie and Warren Cann took a spin in a hire car — literally — at the beginning of recording. "Me and Warren were staying in this pub about three miles away," says Currie. "It was bloody annoying actually, because you couldn't get two words out of Warren in the morning." On the way to the studio on a freezing cold February morning, the car began to skid on ice. "The Canadian comes to the rescue in a perfect example of not turning the fucking car over, which was brilliant, clever bloke."

It wouldn't be the last time Cann would lose control of his vehicle in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, and the next time resulted in a broken arm. Luckily, most of the drums had already been laid down by then. He'd taken Plank's car into Cologne, something bands often did to escape the studio for a few hours. "You'd see him sitting there in the studio with a cigarette and his typewriter," says Ure, "and he's writing down ideas for lyrics."

For this album, the band strove to subvert meaning using a slightly modified version of the cut-up method devised by Brion Gysin, revolutionised by William S Burroughs and adopted by the likes of David Bowie, Kurt Cobain and Thom Yorke. Except, instead of cutting up phrases from print and then reassembling them by way of divination, Ultravox took sentences Ure, Cann and bassist Chris Cross had written in notebooks or on the typewriter and glued them together.

Was *Rage In Eden* a concept album, then? "It was more experimental than a concept," says the singer. "I suppose the thing that glues all of this together is the environment we were in for all that time and the way we were working with lyrics, which was a bit like the Bowie cut-up lyric thing, where you could move statements around so that each song didn't necessarily have a story."

Furthermore, they did something that was highly controversial for a pop band, particularly with post-punk roots, when three songs on side two segued into each other in what could certainly be described as a "suite". Soon, the music press were calling them "the new Genesis" and — guess what? — it was intended pejoratively.

"I can't remember that, but I would have taken it as a bit of an insult at the time," says Billy Currie. "And I probably would have said 'bollocks to that'. I wouldn't in retrospect, but I wasn't a fan of Genesis, particularly. I mean, we weren't averse to slipping into a 7/4 time signature now and again ourselves, even if people consider us 4/4 guys."

"Being called the new Genesis wouldn't have bothered us," counters Midge Ure. "We always said we're a rock band that uses whatever technologies are around, and whatever instrumentation we can get our hands on, and that's probably no different from what bands have been doing for the last 10 or 15 years. Look at Radiohead, they're a rock band, but they've gone over the edge, they experiment and they don't appear to be particularly bothered about, you know, three-minute singles. But that's 20 years later."

Experimentalism was often regarded as effete and pretentious by a music press that had embraced Oi! not so long ago, and it took its toll on other performers. "I remember Kate Bush telling me years ago that she was thinking of giving up," says Ure, "and I said, 'Well, you can't. If you give up then I give up, and then somebody else gives up and then we all give up, and then mediocrity wins.' And that's kind of what happens when you're not hearing or seeing anything that effects change. You do your little bit well, I can do a bit of that, and that opens the door, and it changes everything that's coming afterwards."

And 37 years later, she's taking the world by storm again. "I've just come back from touring America with Howard Jones, and it was *everywhere*," says Ure, referring, of course, to *Running Up That Hill (Make A Deal With God)*. "Everyone's talking about Kate Bush, and many of these are people who wouldn't have known who she was six months ago. It's unbelievable."

And 41 years later, *Rage In Eden* sounds as good as it ever did, and even better still with the Steven Wilson stereo mix. "He does a great job, he's really good and he comes with fresh ears," enthuses Midge Ure. "He also finds things in there that I forgot we'd done, because when you're mixing, you eliminate a lot of things." Ultravox may not have been able to eliminate Joe Dolce from the No.1 spot, but it's clear that they were living la dolce vita while recording *Rage In Eden*.

Rage In Eden (40th Anniversary) is out now via Chrysalis. Head to www.ultravox.org.uk for more information.

When **...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead** celebrated their 25th anniversary in 2020 with the release of *X: The Godless Void And Other Stories*, they certainly weren't planning on creating a follow-up quite so soon. Two years on, multi-instrumentalist Conrad Keely tells *Prog* how *XI: Bleed Here Now* was inspired by a certain Canadian band and why they decided to embark on their very own journey into quadraphonic sound.

Words: James McNair **Images:** Dave Creaney

Bleed From Within

The links between music and archery are not often discussed. Intriguing, then, that Conrad Keely believes his band's current album, *XI: Bleed Here Now*, benefited from him accessing his inner Robin Hood.

"It was fun to set up an archery range outside the barn where we were recording," he says down the line from his home in Austin, Texas. "It's a very meditative thing that requires calmness and a careful breath response; great things to access when you've just been stressing over a take. I'd go outside, take aim, and loose the arrow. There are all sorts of metaphors that can go along with that, of course."

Today he's chipper as he reveals ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead have just been filming a promo video for *Millennium Actress*, a *Bleed Here Now* song that seems to count the cost of fame. "Later today we'll rehearse for a couple of hours and last night we worked on our three-part harmonies," he adds.

"Indifference is the ultimate evil; the most dangerous thing. We have to get people to care again."

...And You Will Know Us By The Trail of our quadrophonic sound!

Both Keely and fellow multi-instrumentalist/ToD co-founder Jason Reece have turned 50 since making 2020's *X: The Godless Void And Other Stories*, but Keely says there was "no big drama" and they still feel like 20-year-olds.

Eleven albums into their fearless alternative prog career, ToD know a thing or two about longevity. They've weathered countless line-up changes and major label burn-out, the damaging online leak of 2005's *Worlds Apart*; even a five-year spell when, detached from his bandmates, Keely decamped to Cambodia after tiring of a period living in New York City.

He says that, upon completion of their last European tour in March 2020, ToD felt "confident and cocky"; high on charged performances by a new five-piece line-up, which, by their own estimation, "rivalled anything from our past." But then came a year's worth of cancellations that left them with literally nothing to do.

"I loved it," says Keely. "I had a great time. We had some bad [infection] numbers here in Texas, but we didn't have to stay home and there was no feeling of entrapment. Austin is one of the biggest music towns, and it was nice to escape the typical gig going obligations. There was no FOMO syndrome and I found that liberating."

Off the tour/record/tour treadmill, Keely went hiking with his then-girlfriend and her dogs. He re-read *The Exorcist* and devoured various self-help books on mindfulness and personal psychology. He and his bandmates also consumed stacks of music documentaries; everything from *Summer Of Soul*, Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson's ace film about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival, through to *Classic Albums* episodes on works by Led Zeppelin, Kate Bush, Peter Gabriel and more. Amid all the downtime a couple of ideas emerged. One: perhaps ToD could use lockdown to make a rapid-fire follow-up to *The Godless Void...*, and two: maybe they should do things differently this time.

"We realised that, in the past, we'd sometimes set out to make albums that were deliberately challenging," says Keely. "But this time we thought, what if we made an album that wasn't so contrarian? We're living in dangerous times and people need to feel more unified. So there was a desire on this album not to alienate people."

A double album with some fabulous riffage, a choir, brass, synth, organ and strings, *XI: Bleed Here Now* also packs an Irish poem about the four winds sung in Gaelic. The ambition is palpable.

The record's title plays on that of *Be Here Now*, Ram Dass, aka Richard Alpert's landmark 1971 book on spirituality, yoga and meditation. Keely says the book sat on the coffee table of his "new age hippie" parents, but as a child he found it too "far out" to fully investigate. Still, it's not too much of a stretch to imagine Alpert endorsing the sentiments of new ToD song *The Growing Divide*, wherein guest vocalist Britt Daniel of Spoon sings, *'Don't let the sight of the growing divide/ Make you give up on humanity.'*

"Yeah, I think that, in our own way, we're still trying to find a voice and address the chaos of the world we currently live in," says Keely. "There's a lot of looming issues that we need to figure out, and that has to inform what we do creatively. Indifference is the ultimate evil; the most dangerous thing. We have to get people to care again."

Something else ToD garnered from their music doc watching was just how often musicians they admired struck gold when freed from outside distractions. Think Kate Bush making much of *Hounds Of Love* in her home studio, or Zeppelin making *Led Zeppelin IV* at former Hampshire workhouse Headley Grange.

"So we found this old-style Texas barn that hippie bands used to rehearse in back in the 70s," Keely explains. "Outside there were big fields with deer coming through. It was very bucolic, very beautiful."

Inside, ToD set up two drum kits, three different guitar rigs and what became known as 'The Wall Of Synth', the hangout of keyboardist AJ Vincent and his Leslie speaker cabinet. Freed from the tyranny of the studio clock, ToD then set about making *Bleed Here Now* and giving it their all. The sense of the new album being a proper departure deepened when ToD decided to record in quadraphonic

The latest album, *XI: Bleed Here Now.*

sound. Kamran, an old friend at Interscope Records, had developed a free quad-encoding plug-in named Quark, and when ToD discovered how easy it was to use, they were sold.

"We were already recording two drum sets and lots and lots of overdubs," says Keely. "We were thinking, 'How are we gonna space this out?' The album still totally works without quad because the mix has been folded-down to a stereo field. But if you hear the quad version you soon realise what you're missing. It was so much fun spacing out

"This time we thought, what if we made an album that wasn't so contrarian? We're living in dangerous times and people need to feel more unified. So there was a desire on this album not to alienate people."

sounds across four speakers, and I think quad is going to become more and more ubiquitous."

One *Bleed Here Now* song that seems especially potent is *Water Tower*. Intricate piano and rippling drums in 3/4 time give way to a truly epic chorus with monster power chords, Keely singing, *'Every year is a chance to defy/All the troubles our lives have thrown on.'* Elsewhere, the song's lyrics seem evocative of a particular childhood memory. *Prog* wonders if they're autobiographical.

L-R: John Dowey, Conrad Keely , AJ Vincent, Alec Padron, Jason Reece, Ben Redman.

"Yeah," says Keely. "That one's pretty literal. The yellow house it mentions was the house I grew up in when we lived in Olympia in Washington, and the water tower was just up my street. The song was inspired by a recent reunion trip there to visit some old friends. Our conversations always go back to the same thing: our late friend Brady [Gates].

"Brady was a friend that Jason and I had in common," Keely goes on. "If you go back and look at the credits for our second album, *Madonna*, it's dedicated to him; that was around the time he died. Each of us had our own Brady adventures and when we share our memories of them they make us laugh. But the strange thing, looking back, is that he was the one who brought us all together, and he's still doing that now."

Prog is fascinated by this new insight into *Water Tower*, a song that radiates specialness even before you know what it is about. Might it have some kind of totemic power?

"Sure," enthuses Keely, clearly on board with the notion. "I think that's something songwriters thrive on. There's that magical moment in childhood which is full of possibilities, yet might also be full of tragedy. That bittersweetness never really goes away — in fact it can intensify as we get older."

With its diverse instrumentation and questing arrangements, *Bleed Here Now* defies easy categorisation. The inclusivity ToD hoped to achieve is exemplified by the intro of opener *Our Epic Attempts*, where narrators intone *'...And You Will Know Us by the Trail Of Dead'* in 18 different languages. Further in, *Prog* thinks it can detect an early-to-mid period Rush influence on *Penny Candle* and *No Confidence*, two of the album's stand-outs. Fair comment?

"Absolutely," says Keely. "We're still inspired by Rush. In fact *No Confidence* was pretty much my tribute to one of my favourite Rush songs. You know that bit in *Xanadu* that goes [hums the riff that first appears in the said Rush song at 2:53]? Well, *No Confidence* owes something to that."

With Keely including drumming amongst his multi-instrumentalist skills, he must surely have mourned the sad loss of Neil Peart in January 2020, and indeed the loss of Rush the band?

"No, I don't mourn losses," he says matter-of-factly. "People die. Neil Peart lived a great life. But he's gone now, and I don't sit around feeling bad about people that have died, otherwise we'd be doing that all the time and it would be a terrible waste of energy. But the fact that he's gone now... well I'm certainly sad that I never got to see Rush play live. The things that Neil Peart did in his life have inspired us as a band. That's what we live by: his life, not his death."

As our interview winds down, *Prog* quizzes Keely about how far he has come and how far he has wandered. Born in Nuneaton, Warwickshire to parents of Irish and Thai descent, his family emigrated to Hawaii when he was five. It was there that he met and befriended Jason Reece, but the two pals would relocate to Olympia, Washington, then Austin, Texas before forming ToD as a duo in 1994, both of them multitasking on vocals, drums and other instruments.

For Keely, at least, a certain restlessness remained. He lived in Brooklyn, NYC between 2006 and 2011, but found Cambodia "a breath of fresh air" when he lived there for six years. "Not to slag off my fellow Americans, but the Cambodians were amazing to spend time with," he recalls. "They were extremely cool and adventurous. When I first went there Cambodia was the kind of place where you could blow up a cow with a rocket launcher if you wanted to."

Today, though, Austin is where it's at. "We've got a great band line-up that's totally committed to creating a new form from this old template, so I've come to terms with the fact that Austin is home for me. Besides, as musicians and producers we accumulate so much gear. I can't be moving around the world with a room full of synthesisers!"

XI: Bleed Here Now is out now via InsideOut.
See www.trailofdead.com for more information.

Across their previous two albums, **Heilung** have used dark progressive neofolk to provide a window into Europe's past. But on their latest, the experimental collective pay tribute to early civilisations a little further afield. Composer and throat singer Kai Uwe Faust explains how they've used ancient instruments, arcane scrolls and algebra to bring the mysterious *Drif* to life.

Words: Hannah May Kilroy
Images: Andy Julia

There is a song on Heilung's new album *Drif* that comes from the oldest surviving complete work of annotated music. This music was found carved into clay tablets dating back 3,400 years ago, in the Canaanite city of Ugarit, in the northern part of what is now known as Syria.

"It's the oldest song in the world," says Heilung vocalist Kai Uwe Faust excitedly of the music that would become *Nikkal*. "It didn't only have lyrics and notes, it also had plates that described how to tune a string instrument. That's just *incredible* — you can't go deeper."

Given that Heilung, completed by Danish multi-musician and producer Christopher Juul and Norwegian vocalist Maria Franz, describe their music as 'amplified history', such a find was like discovering gold. Formed in 2015, the experimental folk collective bring the past to life, enchanting audiences across multiple music genres with their otherworldly sounds and spectacular live rituals that include ancient instruments, hypnotic chanting, pelts and antlers aplenty, and a warrior choir.

One look at their trajectory shows that Heilung have tapped into a deep-seated need

Deer me: Maria Franz.

"Joy is the essence of success!"

in modern society. Their first ever live performance at 2017's Castlefest went viral on YouTube and is currently sitting at more than 7 million views (if you haven't seen it, watch it immediately), and in just a few years they have risen faster than most bands could ever dream of, playing important venues like London's 3,000-capacity Roundhouse and Colorado's 10,000-capacity Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Their name translates to 'healing' — and it's safe to say that their aim is working.

"The band name is representative of the intention that we have," says Faust, a German native who also works as a tattoo artist specialising in Old Norse tattoos. "We want to bring people healing. To give them a break, a window into an older time.

"I love to be present, and to assist people finding that point where they rest in themselves and disconnect from this busy world and life," he continues. "To have the time to meditate, or rest, or dance so much and get so exhausted, that the brain is *finally* quiet."

There's no doubt that Nordic dark folk is having a moment. Heilung and Norwegian folk troupe Wardruna are leading the charge, but it seems like every day there's another band of this genre popping up. When asked what he thinks about this 'trend', Faust lowers his voice seriously.

"You want me to be plainly honest?" he says. "Then I'll tell you the truth..."

There's a brief silence before he erupts into laughter. "I don't listen to them! I do the same as a tattoo artist; I rarely look to get inspiration from other tattoo artists. I look back instead to Scandinavian rune stones and carvings, to feed my expression with that. I do the same when it comes to music.

"Don't get me wrong, I like the people who make the music similar to us!" he adds. "We are friends with Einar from Wardruna, for example. We had dinner with them at Hellfest. But I want to keep my head clear from influences who are in the same genre."

Heilung's power has a lot to do with their authenticity, from the field recordings they incorporate into their sound, to the ancient instruments they source (a traditional Finnish string instrument called a jouhikko is on the new album, as is a reconstruction of a Bronze Age-era Danish instrument, the lur), to the amount of research that goes into each song, with Faust scouring ancient texts for inspiration. "Though sometimes," he says playfully, "it feels more like these texts are coming to me."

On *Drif*, for example, there is a spell from the Dark Ages that takes its lyrics from coins found in Northern Europe (*Anoana*), a Roman army song from Caesar's march of triumph (*Urbani*), and an ancient healing spell for a horse (*Nesso*).

"We want to bring people healing. To give them a break, a window into an older time."

The lengths Kai, Christopher and Maria will go to to hand-deliver their Christmas lists.

Then there's *Tenet*, inspired by the Sator Square, a mysterious 'magic square' of letters found in the city of Herculaneum, which was buried under the ashes of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The letters on the square are palindromes, reading the same forwards, backwards and diagonally in both directions.

"The square travelled," explains Faust. "It's engraved in Danish churches, there's even an Icelandic inscription. That's something we thought was worth mentioning, this travelling of ideas, and how this little square remained in the consciousness of people for so long: more than 2,000 years. That's fascinating. And no one can say 100 per cent what it means. Some said it was old healing stuff, some thought it was Satanism!"

The music for *Tenet* itself is also a palindrome – all of the individual musical parts, melodies and instruments play the same both forward and backwards. In order to do this, Heilung created a special code system taken from the square itself.

"Christopher has this amazing, mathematical brain and he developed an algorithm," Faust explains. "We had sheets over sheets of codes and names." He laughs: "When the three of us are in a room together, it's like three super-nerds – we just go for it."

While their previous two albums, 2015's *Ofnir* and 2019's *Futha*, focused mainly on prehistoric northern Europe, *Drif* sees the trio explore other civilisations around the world. Like the aforementioned *Nikkal*, which is rooted in Syria, the closing track on the album, *Marduk*, explores the 50 names of Marduk, the highest god of the Mesopotamians. The lyrics came from an ancient poem taken from the ruined library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, known now as modern-day Mosul, Iraq.

"I love the names of Marduk himself, and had extracted them a while ago," Faust says. "When we landed in that area of the world with the *Nikkal* song, I knew it was time for the *Marduk* pieces to come in. Those two songs are holding hands; one floats into the other.

"When we look at the civilisations of the north, they were curious people; people who went travelling all over, from northern Africa to the Middle East," Faust continues. "In northern Norway, they have found glass beads that were produced in what is now Syria, and they have found little Buddhas inside Viking graves. Our forefathers had trading routes and were bringing over a lot of stuff. Not only goods, but also ideas.

"Everything is connected at some point and time," Faust says, which brings to mind Heilung's chant that opens all their live performances: '*Remember, that we all are brothers/All people, beasts, trees and stone and wind/We all descend from the one great being/That was always there/Before people lived and named it/Before the first seed sprouted.*'

"When the three of us are in a room together, it's like three super-nerds – we just go for it."

Much of Heilung's inspiration also comes from Faust's own spiritual retreats. He escapes into nature for periods on his own, completely switching off from modern society, fasting, meditating, and not speaking – only praying or singing.

"At some point the body really cleanses out," Faust says of these retreats. "What happens in the brain is amazing – your inner experiences become very vivid and very clear. I don't take the intention into the retreat like I'm going in for a song, but often I come out of these periods with things that become a part of Heilung." He explains how the opening chants on the first song on the album, *Asja*, came from words he wrote down during one of these retreats.

"Don't ask me what it means!" he laughs. "Like with other Shamanic traditions, it is less about delivering perfect sentences, and less about being a language as such. It's something that should be felt." Faust took these words to Christopher and Maria, and *Asja* was created.

"That was one of those inspiring moments where I could see Christopher and Maria catching on the thread like a flame," Faust says. "There are a lot of one-takes on Heilung recordings. It's beautiful to see when I deliver with this super-raw material, a couple of lines, and how they work it from there."

For Heilung, making art is all about enjoying the process.

"It's less about having an album made, and much more about making it," Faust says. "The time in the studio, where we sit together and have this beautiful, playful process of making Heilung. Which can be very difficult and challenging as well. Like when the three of us stopped smoking at the same time!" he laughs. "But when you work on something that is very fulfilling, the days are very long, but they feel very short. You go home and you're energised more than tired.

"There are a lot of projects that are very success-oriented, like, 'Let's make a hit!'" he continues. "I don't think Heilung is like that. To me, joy is the essence of success."

Drif is out now via Season Of Mist. See www.facebook.com/amplifiedhistory for more information.

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THE PROG INTERVIEW

HUGH BANTON

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Hugh Banton**. As Van der Graaf Generator's longest-serving keyboard player, his distinctive organ lines have underpinned the band's best-known songs over three key periods of their career. Here, the one-time BBC engineer and organ builder recounts VdGG's formative years and their reunion in the mid-00s – as explored in the new box set, *Interference Patterns*. He reveals to *Prog* why he's proud of their creative output… and why he finally accepts the prog rock label.

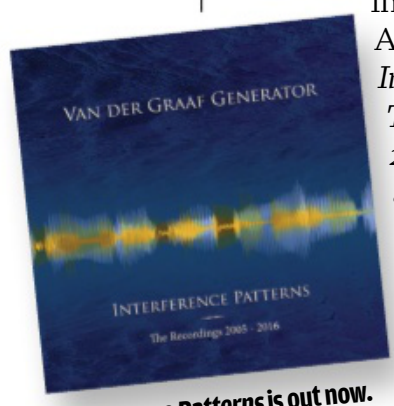
Words: Sid Smith

While other keyboard players of the late 1960s and mid-1970s have lugged their instruments about the stage, hurled cutlery at the keys, or appeared as a caped magician encircled by a towering array of technology in a swirl of dry ice, Hugh Banton has sat sphinx-like behind his modest bank of keyboards since beginning his association with Van der Graaf Generator in 1968. He's been a resolute and unflappable presence, providing much of the instrumental power driving the unorthodox, turbulent sounds crackling from the band.

Having learned piano from the age of four, Banton grew into an accomplished organist, but left performance behind to become a trainee engineer at the BBC. However, the creative explosion in pop music in the 60s, particularly with the Arthur Brown group, pulled his professional life in a different direction. Attracted to complexities and possibilities within Van der Graaf Generator, Banton had a pivotal role in getting the band noticed by Tony Stratton-Smith, which later led to a crucial signing to the fledgling Charisma label.

With a keen ear for textural detail, Banton's thoughtful approach music is inextricably woven into the very soul and fabric of the group's sound; it resonates and resounds throughout a long and eventful career as one of progressive music's most distinctive acts. *The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other* and its follow-up, *H To He, Who Am The Only One*, both released in 1970, and 1971's *Pawn Hearts*, garnered them a cult following, especially in Europe, but a lack of financial support saw them split.

Their dramatic reappearance and delivery of another trio of striking albums between 1975 to 1978, beginning with *Godbluff*, added to their legendary status, while 2005's long-awaited return with *Present* cemented their reputation for continued experimentation and a refusal to indulge in nostalgia. A new 14-disc box set, *Interference Patterns: The Recordings 2005-2016*, presents an overview of the later chapters of the Van der Graaf Generator story.



Interference Patterns is out now.

Often peppering his comments with a deadpan, self-deprecating wit, Banton admits that he doesn't find discussing music easy, not unreasonably preferring to simply play rather than talk. However, in the course of his conversation with *Prog*, he candidly reflects upon the band's momentous life and times. When asked what he brings to Van der Graaf, Banton, now aged 73, quickly replies, "Two manuals and bass pedals

No running back: Van der Graaf Generator circa 1969. L-R: Guy Evans, Hugh Banton, Peter Hammill, Keith Ellis.

PRESS/VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

> As far as playing live again, well, the economics of touring are on a knife edge and, of course, Brexit hasn't helped, but I see no reason why we shouldn't record again.

[laughs]. It's what I've always done. It's hard to talk about really. It's not something I can easily describe because it's just what I do. I try to get it right and try to be interesting."

Did you have any reservations about leaving a secure job at the BBC in order to join a rock band?
Yes, but I was also very interested in pop music, as you'd call it then. It was a particular Arthur Brown concert I saw in 1967 and Vincent Crane was playing the Hammond and I thought, 'That's what I really want to do.' Vince, who later formed Atomic Rooster, was just a first-rate player. Though he was always full of self-doubt, the speed he could play at was just outrageous. He was one of the best without a doubt. He could give Keith Emerson a run for his money. So I was pretty set on replacing my BBC job for music. I'd already met Peter Hammill

KEVIN NIXON

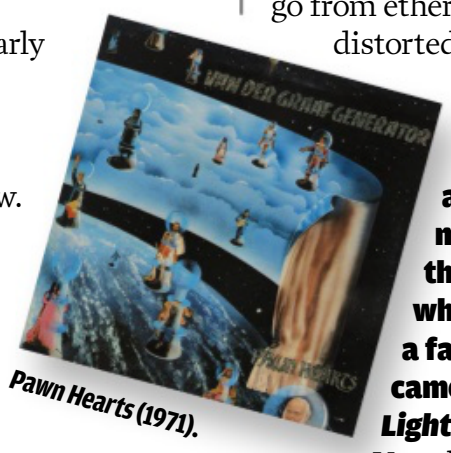
Hugh Banton: the quiet man behind the organ.

and Chris Judge Smith and done some playing together. When Peter went off back to his folks I was left with a three-inch tape reel to see if I could find a drummer and a bass player. I'd placed an advert with [radical underground newspaper] *International Times* and the guy there gave me the telephone numbers of Chris Blackwell of Island Records, John Peel and Tony Stratton-Smith.

At the time Stratton-Smith shared an office with [Kinks and Who producer] Shel Talmy and so I went there and it was Gail Colson [who later managed Peter Gabriel] who answered the door. When Strat listened to the tape he said, 'Oh, I think the voice is a gas!' and the deal was practically done there and then. It was extraordinary because I'd just got on a payphone and got myself a record deal and support for the band and everything. Can you imagine that nowadays? It was such a stroke of luck. Strat told me not to quit my job and to stay with it until we could put the band together and when the time was right he would put us on a retainer, which is what he did. It was £10 a week. I had been earning £50 a month with the BBC before tax, I think, so it was a slight cut but it wasn't massive. It was enough to live on and we were happy to be doing it, getting into The Speakeasy [in London's West End], driving around in the Transit van and playing our music.

You've mentioned Keith Emerson. Did you ever want to emulate his onstage showmanship?

I suppose in my early days I sort of did. I was a bit wilder then. I don't even contemplate it now. Showmanship? What's that? But when you're young and you're trying to find your direction and your niche you do think to yourself, 'Shall I be a mad organist and throw the organ around or do something else?'



Pawn Hearts (1971).

What was your keyboard of choice?

Back then there weren't really many choices. I picked the Farfisa because, although I admired Vince Crane, I didn't want to sound like everyone else. Also Hammond organs were about twice the price [laughs] but that's another issue. If I could get a good sound out of the Farfisa I was going to do that.

Pink Floyd used Farfisa all the time and that appealed to me. Rick Wright's playing on those early Floyd albums is lovely. When our bassist Nic Potter left after *The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other* I got a Hammond primarily so I could take over his duties via bass pedals. The appeal of having both Farfisa and Hammond was the massive tonal range. VdGG has always been very dynamic and to be able to go from ethereal whisperings to distorted anarchy is what I like.

***Pawn Hearts* is now an acknowledged masterpiece but there was a moment when the band had a falling out when it came to *A Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers*...**

Yes, that's right. At the time people forget our career was going into a slow decline. We'd had great press reviews of *The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other* and then slightly less so for *H To He, Who Am The Only One*. Our contemporaries, like Genesis and Lindisfarne, all had numbers that would get the people up on their feet cheering. We didn't have anything like that really until *Killer* and *Lost*. I think there was a feeling at the time that we had to have more of these kinds of numbers otherwise we would lose the meagre audience we'd got. So when *A Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers* was being presented to us, we were wondering if this was quite the way we should be going. I thought, 'Urgh, what is this? We can't even play this thing!' [Laughs] I think I came round to it because it's so fascinating. I suppose I must have thought,

VdGG in the 21st century. L-R: Peter Hammill, Hugh Banton, Guy Evans.

PRESS/VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

Chameleon in the shadows: Hugh Banton photographed exclusively for *Prog*. October, 2022

KEVIN NIXON

> Putting *A Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers* together, we didn't have a clue how it was going to turn out really. We had plenty of ideas to throw at it and in the end it sounds quite amazing, but we didn't know that until we finished it.

'Hell, I'll go with it, because Peter's music is always interesting to get your head around and to work on.' However, by then we had *Man-Erg* so by the time we got to Italy we had a few crowd-pleasers.

Looking back on those early days, despite going down well with audiences the band really struggled on the road, didn't you?

It was a kind of hand-to-mouth existence and very grim from a financial point of view. In '72 we were working our socks off. Those Italian tours we did were insane because we were often playing two shows a day and sometimes three. That's what broke us. It was unbearable. It was always like that. On the earlier tours in Germany in '70 or '71 we were out of funds. Wages that had been sent weren't turning up and so we'd basically starve. It wasn't like now where you have a hotel paid for and food backstage. There wasn't anything like that then. It was a nightmare and that's why when we reformed in 1975 we thought we'd get things properly organised and get our own management.

Given everything you went through the first time, did you have any worries about reforming then?

No, not really. We knew we had a following and we loved doing it. We'd all kept in touch and we'd been playing on Peter's solo albums so it was fairly easy. So we had the opportunity to put things on a proper footing. Charisma gave us a new advance and although that meant we'd be in debt to them again we assumed we'd overcome that in time. Charisma, of course, was very keen for us to do it.

How do you rate *Godbluff*?

The thing about *Godbluff* was that we'd played a lot of it on the road before we recorded it so all the tracks were quite well run in. It means you're pretty confident with what you should play and what you were aiming for. I mean, putting *...Lighthouse Keepers* together, we didn't have a clue how it was going to turn out, really. We had plenty of ideas to throw at it and in the end it sounds quite amazing but we didn't know that until we finished it. With *Godbluff* we had a pretty good idea what

IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Van der Graaf in Paris, May 1974. L-R: Peter Hammill, Hugh Banton, Guy Evans, David Jackson.

it would be like. I think my favourite of the three albums we did then was *Still Life*. *My Room, Childlike Faith In Childhood's End* and *Still Life* itself. They're all great songs.

Why did you quit after *World Record*?

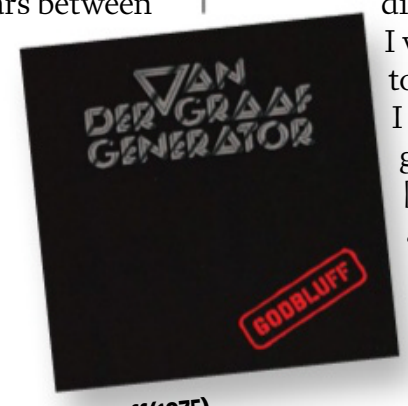
I just didn't want to do it anymore. I just wasn't enjoying myself and thought it best to get out although it was with a heavy heart. I changed my attention very rapidly to being an organ builder. I had a factory job within three months of leaving VdGG and I went on to be technical director of that company, inventing things and designing electronics, which I've always loved doing and I didn't think about much else. My primary interest then, as now, is — I have to admit — organs and electronics. That's what I do. [In 1992 Banton founded his own organ-building company, The Organ Workshop.] Left to my own devices, music takes second place to that.

And yet you returned to the fold in 2005 when the band reformed and released *Present*...

Well, it's different now to how it was back then in the 1970s. The great thing about the way we do it now, with eight years between gigs — which is what we've just done thanks partly to the pandemic, obviously — but even before that we were only playing for a month a year, or perhaps a case of 'maybe not this year, we'll do it next year', that sort of thing, That was the case all the way through since reforming and it's no pressure. I could carry on being an organ builder the rest of the time.

After David Jackson's departure in 2006, you decided to carry on as a trio. How much of a challenge was that?

We were faced with the decision to either stop or bring somebody else into the group, which we didn't want to do. I was determined not to stop then because I had only just gotten going after 28 years [laughs]. It was a case of persuading Peter that it would work. We were all enjoying the reunion. We really wanted to continue it so we thought, 'Let's try it as a three-piece.' It gave Peter a chance to build on his guitar. He soon warmed to it and I'm always evolving my organ system so I worked on that. Doing it as a three-piece after *Present* was, I suppose, similar to when Nic Potter left and we carried on with me taking over his role on the bass pedals.



Godbluff (1975).

> Vincent Crane was just a first-rate player. Though he was always full of self-doubt, the speed he could play at was just outrageous. He was one of the best, without a doubt.

How has the band's writing approach evolved over the years, particularly since 2005?

It varies. Sometimes Peter comes up with a complete song and we do nothing apart from play it. Other times he comes along with bits. Sometimes he cobbles together bits of things that I've sent him. I did go through a period of sending him little snippets. He uses everything! There's not a single thing I've sent to him, however useless, that he hasn't incorporated into the songs. I wrote a big chunk of *Over The Hill*, from 2008's *Trisector* album; sort of instrumental tunes and things. Then he elaborates on them, puts lyrics on, and then brings in another bit that he's written and sticks it on, and out comes *Over The Hill,* for example. A number of them are formed like that. Some of them, as I say, he has pretty much correct and they just need playing or might need

Here's one they made earlier: with VdGG at the London Palladium in February 2022.

WILL IRELAND

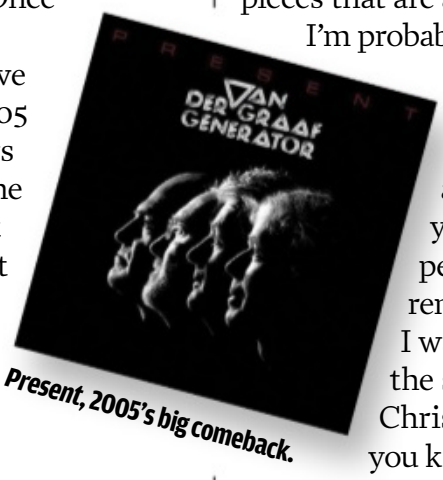
a solo section or something, but nothing too elaborate. Sometimes he literally needs some help to get from A to B, which we used to do more often in the past. Peter has evolved phenomenally as a composer. We've often sounded different several times, I think. Peter's voice is going to be pretty distinctive through all of these periods, but I had different organs such as the stuff I was playing in the *H To He...* and *Pawn Hearts* era is different from what I was doing around *Godbluff*, *Still Life* and so on. Once again, it's different compared to what I've been doing since 2005 as well. So it's always subtly different; same people, but different electronics, different instruments.

VdGG have this habit of lurking unseen for long periods of time and then suddenly emerging out of the undergrowth...

Yes, I think we're coming back in 2096 [laughs]. Well, we've never parted company, and the fact that the same people have always been available and we always remained friends has meant it has always been possible to get together. It's just a case of whether we wanted to do it or not at any given time. After 1976 I sort of came back to it fairly slowly over a period of nearly 30 years.

At some of your gigs it's not uncommon for audiences to be deeply affected by the music. Does music ever make you cry?

No, not anymore, I don't think. It may have done once, though. I've recorded Elgar's *Nimrod* on *100 Up Vol 1* [a classical collection available on Bandcamp]. That's a good one for being emotional and there are a couple of Bach pieces that are astounding but I'm probably just going to be a grumpy old person now. Of course, music has a huge impact on you as a young person. I can remember when I was starting out in the school choir with Christmas coming up, you know, anything that we were doing like that, without doubt, would get me every time. But at this stage in life, I'm just hypercritical, unfortunately. It's just something one has to put up as one gets old.



Present, 2005's big comeback.

Do you listen to any contemporary bands at all?

Most of my musical input these days comes from listening to the radio — Classic FM — so I just take pot luck with that, as one has to. Funnily enough, when we were on holiday in France, my eldest son, who is 40, was telling me that he doesn't listen to anything from this decade. He grew up with Muse and Radiohead.

What do your children make of what you do?

I've got two sons and the youngest son came to see us when we were performing at the Palladium in London earlier this year. The oldest one has seen us many times before. What do they think about it? I imagine they just think it's what Dad does when he's not building an organ. I think they find it oddly fascinating.

Trisector (2008).

Over the years VdGG has developed a reputation as the prog rock band that people who don't like prog feel it's cool to like. What's your take on that?

Prog rock was never a phrase that was used in the 1970s and when we reformed we said, 'We're not prog rock', but we've given way now on that and we own up as being part of that world as we always had a progressive outlook. I always thought prog rock started with Hendrix and the latter Beatles and Floyd. It was a natural evolution that was going on. The label was put on much later. We were just doing our own thing like everyone else was. We never saw ourselves as being prog in that way. We saw ourselves as being unique, as most bands do, I expect.

What does the future hold for VdGG now?

I have no idea. We haven't really discussed anything since Peter was hospitalised on that last tour in May and we had to cancel the rest of it. He's fine and fully recovered now, by the way. As far as playing live again, well, the economics of touring are on a knife edge and, of course, Brexit hasn't helped, but I see no reason why we shouldn't record again.

VdGG have been a significant feature of your life for over 50 years. How would you sum it up?

It's really the only band I've ever really been in and I'm proud it was this one.

Interference Patterns: The Recordings 2005-2016 is out now via Cherry Red. For more see www.vandergraafgenerator.co.uk.

Edited by Dave Everley
prog.reviews@futurenet.com

New spins...

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Progressive electronic pop doyen goes on a binaural odyssey by way of a trip back to Paris and 1968.

Words: Jeremy Allen **Illustration:** Mark Leary

Jean-Michel Jarre achieved global recognition with his 1976 album *Oxygène*, selling 12 million albums at a time when progressive music was supposedly in retreat. Forty-six years later, he brings us *Oxymore*, which suggests we're in for more of the same — or at the very least, we'll be treated to some motifs from across the decades. The title turns out to be a red herring. It's a play on 'oxymoron' rather than a declaration of more *Oxygène*, an obvious semantic correlation that Jarre claims he didn't notice initially.

If *Oxymore* has an antecedent then it's 1984's *Zoolook*, a record that used the Fairlight CMI to build sonic worlds, festooned with manipulated voices spouting 25 different languages. But the listener needs to go back further still to 1968 to identify the true inspiration for *Oxymore*, to the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM), where Jarre studied under musique concrète pioneers Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. Schaeffer would come to renounce his sonic experiments towards the end of his life in 1995, but the other Pierre was still composing with found sounds well into the 21st century.

Henry's voice is present on the introductory track, *Agora*, and it recurs intermittently throughout. On *Agora* (Greek for 'gathering place'), the listener first detects what sounds like typing on a page, followed by dripping water that fulminates in a gush, then sporadic voices and whispering, chopped up and moving from speaker to speaker over some radio static. Then comes Henry, the daring Paris-born composer, talking about the process of making compositions using the fabric of sound, all in French of course.

Agora sets things up nicely for the title track, a dramatic and ominous example of where we'll go, a kind of primordial dawn of recorded sound built from the fragments of objets trouvés, mixed in a state-of-the-art studio. The *Oxymore* oxymoron refers to the contrasts of collage, exploring the possibilities of cutting-up fragments with cutting-edge technology, 110 years after Picasso and Braque were slipping bits of newspaper into their painted canvases at the height of Cubism. Montage is no longer a radical artform these days, though the way Jarre melds electro-acoustic sounds with his ultra-modern studio creates a fascinating tension.

Oxymore: Homage To Pierre Henry

SONY MUSIC

> **His desire to shape the future leaves little room for nostalgia.**

Jarre had hoped to work with Henry when he recorded more than 30 collaborations for his *Electronica* project — released in two volumes in 2015 and 2016. Sadly, his sonic guru was too ill to contribute, but before Henry died, he made a series of recordings that were bequeathed to Jarre via his wife, Isabelle Warnier. The stems full of concrète sounds, as well as the composer talking about processes and textures, form the basis of Jarre's 22nd studio album.

Oxymore is perhaps most interesting thanks to Jarre's willingness to return to the GRM with the same mindset he would have had in 1968. He eschews melody in favour of strange textures and disembodied, sometimes coquettish voices, like on *Sex In The Machine* and *Synthy Sisters*. Definable, ear-catching tunes are sacrificed to the gods of experimentation, but the unifying dance grooves he presents make for a cogent and cohesive experience.

When JMJ became famous in the mid-to-late 70s, it was partly thanks to his decision to take his avant-garde training and marry it to accessible, catchy melodies like on the hit single *Oxygène (Part IV)*; moreover, his music tapped into a general optimism engendered by space travel, and a naïve assumption of progress. Here we get the brutality of *Brutalism*, or the Poe-like horror of *Animal Genesis*, and that positivity has evaporated, with more of a sense that we're stuck in an awesome dystopian machine from which it's impossible to escape. If it's punishing at times, it also illustrates why Jarre is an artist who has, for the most part, remained in touch with what's going on. His music oozes with the now, and it always has.

The titular oxymoron, then, where future meets past, also extends to the way we listen. Recorded sound has come on in leaps and bounds since Schaeffer founded the Studio d'Essai in 1941, and then later the GRM, although we've been living with stereophonic sound since the late 60s and there's been little in the way of progress in the way we consume music since then. Jarre made a case for 5.1 surround sound around the release of his compilation, *AERO*, in 2004, and while 5.1 didn't catch on other than in cinemas, he goes in to bat for binaural sound this time around. The enhanced binaural mix isn't available as we go to press, though listening, it's easy to imagine how it might work. Ever the innovator, Jean-Michel Jarre's desire to shape the future leaves little room for nostalgia.

DEVIN TOWNSEND

Lightwork HEVYDEVY RECORDS/INSIDEOUT

Canadian maverick swaps heavy riffs for synths and strings.

Born from material that Devin Townsend wrote during the pandemic, *Lightwork* finds him in a reflective, optimistic mood. Unusually, the one-man prog powerhouse brought in a co-producer for the album in the form of GGGarth Richardson, whose credits include Rage Against The Machine, Melvins and Biffy Clyro. The result of their collaboration isn't what might be expected given Richardson's extensive background in heavy rock. *Lightwork* builds on the direction Townsend pointed towards on *Empath*, with less emphasis on mammoth guitar riffs and venturing into the territory of progressive pop.

> **It ventures into the territory of progressive pop.**

Sonically, Townsend maintains his trademark wall of sound, like a proggy version of Phil Spector minus the evil undercurrent. It's a huge, deep mix, with instruments layered upon each other measured in fathoms, big, punchy drums, and vast swathes of strings and synthesisers. The opening *Moonpeople* establishes the vibe, with Townsend touching on falsetto with his vocals, a cheerfully catchy chorus hook, and lyrics that introduce the album's themes about self-discovery and coming out of the darkness, metaphorically addressing all the uncertainties of the pandemic.

Lightworker has hints of the musical theatre of *Why?* from *Empath*, with a monster chorus and production expertly designed to bowl the listener over. It feels guaranteed to be an absolute behemoth live. There are several moments when the album brings to mind the style of Tears For Fears and in tracks like *Equinox* and *Call Of The Void*, Townsend even sounds like Curt Smith, although some distorted singing serves to underline his metal roots. If not for the occasional screamed vocals, *Equinox* could fit on *The Seeds Of Love*, the songwriting is that strong and the production suitably lavish. *Call Of The Void* is reassuringly hopeful, Townsend, urging the listener not to freak out: *'Because when you feel the world's insane, relax!' Vacation* is a mellow slice of sunshine as Townsend opines about longing to get away from it all.

Dimensions adds an industrial edge to the album with its NIN-style pulsing synths and machine-like drumbeat and the album closes with the expansive *Children Of God*, which brings back the prog pop aesthetic. *Lightwork* may be the closest that Townsend has come to a conventional set of songs, and it's almost a shock to hear the mind behind *Ziltoid The Omniscient* offering the world a musical hug, but being unanticipated doesn't make it any less enjoyable. The final sound on the album is a lighthouse's lonesome foghorn, calling the listener home, guiding them out of the dark and into the light. Glorious.

DAVID WEST

BANCO DEL MUTUO SOCCORSO

Orlando: Le Forme Dell'Amore INSIDEOUT

Italian veterans hit their half-century with inventive poetic adaptation.

Key progenitors of the Rock Progressivo Italiano movement, Banco Del Mutuo Soccorso mark their 50th anniversary with an album that distils a vast 16th century Italian poem into a single concept album.

With keyboard maestro Vittorio Nocenzi the only remaining founder member, *Orlando...* kicks off with the gentle piano and synth woodwind of the scene-setting *Proemio* introducing the world of chivalry, conflict and extremes of romantic love about to be explored. Conventional structures are largely secondary to storytelling; while there are great hooks, themes and leitmotifs – the jazzy passages in *La Pianura Rossa*, the call-and-response between guitar and keys in *Cadere O Volare*, vocalist Tony D'Alessio's passionate exhortations in *Cosa Vuol Dire Per Sempre* – song development can seem counter-intuitive.

With terrific performances from everyone involved, especially Nocenzi and guitarists Nicola Di Già and Filippo Marcheggiani, *Orlando: Le Forme Dell'Amore* is a delight for the band's aficionados and acts as a superb snapshot of the rich, sometimes idiosyncratic and deeply expressive world of Italian prog. **GMM**

DANIEL BIRO

Synthrospections 7: Earthly Reflections SARGASSO

Another one-take wonder from the worldly synth artist.

Synth player and composer Daniel Biro studied piano at Monaco's Jazz Conservatory and got his music degree from Nice University before settling in London in the 80s. In 2021 he started his 'Synthrospections' – improvised, one-man keyboard concerts livestreamed to listeners across the world. The seventh of these was recorded in June this year – Biro gave a talk on one of his heroes, the late Vangelis, and then played this 40-minute synth work, in just one take.

That takes some nerve and a great deal of skill, but Biro's confidence in his abilities is borne out by the results. *Earthly Reflections* isn't an especially adventurous melodic experiment, but in terms of mood and sonics it's an captivating piece. Inevitably, Biro pays due tribute to Vangelis: the central section is a blend of lyrical, sweeping melodies and machine-like rhythmic pulses. Biro has assimilated the work of other pioneers too. The opening 10 minutes – a one-note bass vamp underpinning some jazzy improv – evokes Richard Wright's more languorous moments on Pink Floyd's mid-70s output, while the ghost of Klaus Schulze is another presence on this richly atmospheric achievement. **GRM**

CAN

Live In Cuxhaven 1976 MUTE/SPOON

Krautrock pioneers get laid-back and funky on latest live release.

The third instalment in Can's ongoing series of archival live albums finds the band in a looser mood compared to some of the more intense jams featured on the previous two. Recorded in January 1976 in the town of Cuxhaven on Germany's North Sea coast, there's a fittingly aquatic vibe to much of the music here, gently surging in fluid waves and eddies.

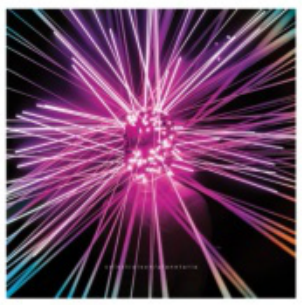
This spacier take on Can's sound is evident on *Eins*, its scuttering beat and bass throb subtly adorned with Irmin Schmidt's keening organ and spare, funky soloing from Michael Karoli. In fact, while rhythmically more ambitious, it's not a million miles from pre-*Dark Side Of The Moon* Pink Floyd, whose influence on the krautrock scene can't be overstated. *Zwei* continues the laid-back vibe – the way it ebbs and flows is just wonderful, the dynamics masterfully controlled by Jaki Liebezeit's patiently evolving percussion.

Drei nods towards *Dizzy Dizzy*, before entering that zone of uncertainty where avant-rock starts to morph into free jazz. But *Vier* is Can once again as playful jam band, responding to an appreciative audience by kicking back and having some fun. **JB**

CELESTIAL SON

Planeteria PRIME COLLECTIVE

Danish synth proggers enlist big-name help on third album.



Copenhagen's Celestial Son have only released one EP and two studio albums since their 2003 formation. But this first long player in seven years proves the effectiveness of taking your time.

While Rasmus Sjogren's songs are shot through with an epic widescreen ambition in keeping with an intrinsically prog mindset, he's obviously absorbed plenty of more diverse influences. *Rise Of A Cosmic Dragon* blends grinding industrial techno motifs with a sparkling, cascading synth riff, before echoing Japan (band more than country) in its use of Eastern instrumental sounds and coolly crooning vocals. Elsewhere, *Lord Of Karma* and *Reen* employ Depeche Mode-ish stylings before the latter is lifted by anguished vocal howls and insistent, krautrock-echoing marching beats.

The way *Avian Heart*'s stinging, angular guitar motif softens into a romantic sweep of a chorus is reminiscent of some of Porcupine Tree's more wistful moments – perhaps no coincidence given Gavin Harrison adds polyrhythmic percussion to this and several other tracks. Exalted company to be keeping, but Celestial Son sound well-deserving of being in the same room. **JS**

SARO COSENTINO

The Road To Now CAT SOUNDS

Atmospheric collection from Italian composer and multi-instrumentalist.

Saro Cosentino has a background in pop production and TV/film work, and he's applied sumptuous orchestrations and glossy sheen to each of the eight tunes here. The sound and feel here is reminiscent of his 1997 album, *Ones And Zeros*, and like that previous release, *The Road To Now* features guest vocals from Peter Hammill, Tim Bowness and Karen Eden, plus instrumental contributions from members of King Crimson and Peter Gabriel's band.

Impeccably produced, with the exception of one instrumental track featuring Trey Gunn's sinuous touch guitar, the rest of the album is in thrall to slow and medium-paced melancholic ballads musing upon love, life, and loss. The best of these is Hammill's *Time To Go* and *When Your Parents Danced*, each imbued with a poignant depth.

However, taking the album as a whole it lacks any significant contrasts in tone or dynamic gear shifts with Cosentino's unfailingly empathetic arrangements carefully positioning everything in a pervasive soft focus haze. Though beautifully rendered, the cumulative result becomes indistinct and worryingly interchangeable. **SS**

BRIAN ENO

Foreverandevernomore UMC

Ambient innovator voices concerns over humanity's future.

Brian Eno's campaigning on humanitarian issues has been running for almost as long as his work in the realms of ambient music and electronic exploration. For his 29th solo studio album, the venerable pioneer and producer brings together his concerns for the ecology with his ever expanding musical vernacular.

What's immediately apparent is that, while welcoming him behind the microphone, Eno's lyrical concerns move in tandem with the ethereal music that he creates. This is less to do with hectoring and more in line with subtle persuasion. The sublime *Icarus Or Blériot* is a case in point wherein Eno explores the dichotomy at the heart of scientific exploration: the benefit to the wider community versus the cost and profit for the few.

The lachrymose *There Were Bells* is tempered by soothing and comforting sweeps that sweeten the lyrical pill. Indeed, the soundscapes and grand strokes are easy to escape into for this is an album that undulates, ebbs and flows like a gentle river through a quiet and glorious countryside. But through it all runs Eno's plangent voice, which is as much a part of the instrumentation as it is a vessel for his message. **JM**

GLASS HAMMER

At The Gate SOUND RESOURCES/ARION RECORDS

Symphonic proggers deliver final instalment of vast Skallagrim epic.

It's been a monumental task on many levels, but Glass Hammer mainman Steve Babb and partner-in-prog Fred Schendel have finally completed their trio of albums — and accompanying novel — recounting the sci-fi/sword and sorcery exploits of the thief Skallagrim, his anthropomorphic sword and a quest for love and memory.

> **It isn't quite as climactic as Skallagrim deserves.**

The first album in this series, *Dreaming City,* had several guest artists appearing, especially in the vocal department. And, although the follow-up, *... Into The Breach*, had a much leaner line-up, between them Babb and Schendel explored a variety of styles including space rock, electronica, playful 70s-inspired prog and even country rock. With *At The Gate*, the line-up remains compact and the music direction veers much more solidly into classic and symphonic rock territory.

There are big 70s-edged rockers like *Savage* with its great swaggering guitar and Hammond, and *All Alone* which is part rocking clarion call, part stark desperation. Occasionally, points of reference suggest themselves — *The Years Roll By* feels somewhat reminiscent of Magenta, due perhaps to Hannah Pryor's clear yet robust vocal delivery, and *Standing At The Gate*'s slightly discordant main riff has a whiff of Spock's Beard about it, although the verse vocals take some unexpected clever turns. Elsewhere, dreamy instrumental *North Of North* has light washes of synth playing against a spacey sequenced keyboard with a spritely one-two sucker punch interlude of Hammond.

Approaching the denouement, *In The Shadows* stays with the bare bones of piano and voice — Pryor providing poignant conflicting statements of hope and despair. Slowly building from its initially decidedly Beatles-esque beginnings, *It's Love* ends the album with a feel not unlike a super-charged Fleetwood Mac, before fading to silence.

Taken as a trio of albums, overall enjoyment and appreciation of this mountain of music will be much enhanced by a total immersion in the grand sweep of the story, the lyrics, the sounds and essence of Skallagrim's saga. It has been an epic undertaking, simply by dint of its proportions, and Glass Hammer are to be applauded for their ambition and vision, but such ambition can create the pressure of expectation. *At The Gate* is a big album with big themes. It's terrifically performed, very well produced and packaged marvellously. A monumental opus certainly; yet, in the end, there's a nagging feeling that our farewell to Skallagrim isn't quite as climactic, as exciting, as surprising and as much of a progression from its two preceding instalments as he might deserve.

GARY MACKENZIE

VIRGIL & STEVE HOWE

Lunar Mist INSIDEOUT

The Yes star presents powerful new music written by his late son.

It's a tragedy that Virgil Howe died aged just 41, and only months before the November 2017 release of his first album with father, Steve Howe. The acclaimed *Nexus* was a strong, compelling record that added to Virgil's standing as a respected drummer, keyboardist and composer, and spoke to the musical DNA that father and son shared. There were no plans for another release from the pair, but two years ago Howe Sr began scouring laptops, hard drives and the family's studio in the West Country for all the fresh music he could find by his son. Over Christmas 2020 he took these ideas, demos and half-complete tunes and began developing them into this unexpected treat of an album.

> **It's a communication between father and lost son.**

Its otherworldly title track — with its dulcimer-like hook and insistent piano line and groove — was completed before Virgil's death but had been left on the shelf. Here and elsewhere, it's striking how much of the debut's spacey musical character remains on *Lunar Mist*.

Virgil's work with rock band Little Barrie meant that he was perhaps perceived as more of a drummer than keyboardist, but there's much here to redress the balance. There's some serious percussion on the funky closer *Martian Mood*, but the melodic piano lines of *Never Less* are those of a gifted pianist. The electric piano of *As If Between*, *Dirama*'s warm synth strings — are considered, and highly sympathetic to the compositions they colour.

Steve Howe's fretwork is, needless to say, subtly sensational throughout. Whether on nylon-string guitar (the melancholy, classical-leaning *Never Less*), electric (the low-tempo, bluesy *Dirama*; the strident *A Month In The Sun*) or steel-string acoustic (that mesmerising title track), his work is typically mindful, and respectful of the composer.

One of *Lunar Mist*'s finest moments is *Mariah's Theme*, a gentle, languid and quietly complicated piece packed with exotic top lines, Mellotron-like strings and instinctive, after-the-fact interplay from Steve. There's plenty of room in the music too, the sparse arrangement letting the piece's irresistible motifs breathe. Similarly, on the face of it the moody *Lothian's Way* is simple, but it's imbued with some juicy chords, sweet melodies and nicely alien electronic production touches that elevate the whole thing.

The elegant call-and-response piece *More Than You Know* first sees Virgil's synth answered by Steve's beautiful acoustic guitar lines, and the musical roles are then reversed. It sounds like communication between father and lost son. It's a deeply touching moment on a high-pedigree record. *Lunar Mist* is a welcome, moving surprise.

GRANT MOON

EXIST IMMORTAL

Exist Immortal SEEK & STRIKE

UK tech metallers show their class on fourth album.

Although Exist Immortal's last album came out in 2016, the UK prog metal crew have been anything but inactive lately. In the last two years, they've released a trilogy of EPs and now this, their fourth long-player.

Exist Immortal won't surprise longtime acolytes or anyone who has already caught the band seizing the stage at such prog weekenders as Euroblast and TechFest. It's what they do best: highly intricate musicianship condensed into hard rock anthems with the odd metalcore scream chucked in – although they have tapped plenty of outside talent this time around. Ex-Sikth singer Joe Rosser joins for opener *Behind The Eyes*, where guitars tap away beneath infectious croons. The subsequent *Signal Fire* showcases the talents of guitarist Moray Pringle. However, the show-stealer here is *Trapped Inside*. After commencing with a lick delicate and polyrhythmic enough to floor Plini, it's a cavalcade of choruses and solos that ascend into a perfect symphonic conclusion.

Ultimately, *Exist Immortal* doesn't push back any boundaries, but its melody and prog precision makes it well worth a spin or five. **MM**

GIRIH

Ikigai DUNK!RECORDS/A THOUSAND ARMS MUSIC

New Hampshire three-piece seek life's purpose. Or do they?

What you love, what the world needs, what you're good at and what you can be paid for. These focus points plot the start of finding your ikigai, the Japanese concept for determining one's purpose in life; not a bad premise for a concept record. On their second album, Manchester, New Hampshire post-metallers Girih once again plumb the heavier end of instrumental prog with this in mind. Or do they?

From the titles this is unclear, although tracks seem to be paired (*The Door* and *The Key*, for example) and the overall feel has less of the doom of their debut, *Eigengrau*, and more of a gothic chill. Instrumentals such as opener *The Mirror* and *The Sand* start delicately, then develop epic peaks with arpeggiated electronics and propulsive tribal drum rolls – *The Sand* is particularly reminiscent of Mogwai. Others are just heavy as hell, such as the slow-grooving post-metal death march *The Hourglass* and the standout lead track, *The Ring*, which tips into black metal with its confident chord choices and frenzied breaks. Girih's ikigai is still obscure, then, but their potential certainly seems to be widening. **JK**

GOAT

Oh Death ROCKET

Swedish cult band return with a more focused take on their sound.

When Goat's *World Music* debut was released in 2012, they seemed to be one of those bands who'd emerged fully formed from the womb: a troupe of mysterious, mask-wearing Swedes playing a dynamic fusion of ritualistic psychedelia, Thai beat and Afro-funk. Ten years on and it looks like that initial impression was correct, because *Oh Death* is very much more of the above. And yet, this is quite possibly their best album to date – it still has that commune acid test vibe, but the arrangements have been tightened and honed for maximum pleasure. The opening quartet of tracks is particularly strong. *Soon You Die* is an ecstatic buzzsaw groove, like dropping into the middle of a jam that's been happening between Funkadelic and the Stooges since 1972. The reverberant freak folk of *Chukua Pesa* takes us further into the alt dimension where Goat reside, a world where the Incredible String Band have replaced the Beatles. *Under No Nation* is skeletal post-punk à la Talking Heads, before peeling off into black sky psych, aided and abetted by some wild skirling sax. And the Burundi drumming, power chords and pub piano of *Do The Dance* is glam rock exotica. Fabulous stuff. **JB**

JOHN HOLDEN

Kintsugi JOHNHOLDENMUSIC.COM

Another 'cracking' album from the English prog maven.

Perennially interesting multi-instrumentalist John Holden has a knack for intelligent themes. His fourth album takes its name from the Japanese art of fixing cracked pottery with gold, making a feature of both the breakage and repair.

The parallels with human damage and resilience are clear, and this idea is just one strand in an eclectic, richly textured record, drawing on golden-era prog, orchestral music and traditional song too. Often all these are broached in one piece, such as the title track, featuring Tiger Moth Tales' Peter Jones in top vocal form and a guitar solo from Mystery's Michel St-Père. Joe Payne's quasi-operatic voice enlivens epic opener *Achilles*, and if that song nods at Alan Parsons then the bright, mid-tempo *Against The Tide* (Jones again) could be Mike + The Mechanics trying their hand at yacht rock.

Sally Minnear is a welcome presence on the folky *Peggy's Cove* and *Ringing The Changes* (a sweet tale about bell-ringers), and the great Dave Bainbridge and flautist Jean Pageau are star players on *Building Heaven*, the ambitious opus that closes *Kintsugi*, the best album yet from this under-heard talent. **GRM**

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD

Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms And Lava/ Changes/Laminated Denim KGLW

Three simultaneous releases from Aussie's leading cosmic explorers.

Critics insist that the Australian psychedelists King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard's prodigious work rate is little more than an extended bout of musical incontinence spraying out in all directions. But their many releases are best judged on their individual merits rather than taken as a whole.

Each of these three(!) new albums is fuelled by a specific concept and, in turn, by a particular musical delivery. So it is that *Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms And Lava* is fashioned from a series of jams and then edited into shape à la Can's modus operandi. The longest of the three releases, it's also the funkiest as it harnesses influences ranging from spiritual jazz through to Afrobeat with the drawn-out grooves of *Hell's Itch* proving to be a particular joy.

Changes is built on the idea of using a single chord progression with minor alterations throughout and, with most of the tracks clocking in around the four-minute mark, it's the most pithy, breezy and accessible (see *Hate Dancin* and *Gondii*). *Laminated Denim*'s two 15-minute jams bring up the rear to third-eye effect. **JM**

MAJOR PARKINSON

Valesa - Chapter 1: Velvet Prison APOLLON RECORDS

Eclectic Norwegians' most accessible album yet.

Major Parkinson's stonking 2017 album *Blackbox* was a prog certified mash-up of sweeping electronics and cinematic grandeur. The Norwegians have chosen to dial into their increasing synth inclination on follow-up *Valesa - Chapter 1: Velvet Prison*, which strides down a more experimental pop avenue.

There's a lot to chew on here. Its 17 tracks - some vignettes - paint a vivid picture of self-described "uneasy nostalgia" of the 1980s. *Saturday Night* and the peppy *Live Forever* nod to art-pop, while husky vocalist Jon Ivar Kollbotn is offered a new freedom to roam. There is still some trademark, off-kilter tomfoolery, though; the haunting, off-timed *House* lurches and gurns to odd timing, and *Moma* romps at breakneck speed, cap-doffing to their Cardiacs influence, drummer Sondre Veland having imbibed too many Red Bulls. In a hurry? Try the magnificent *Jonah*, which lavishes on rousing gospel choir splendour to finish.

Some may argue that Major Parkinson could be losing some of their cult charm on *Valesa - Chapter 1: Velvet Prison*, but this is the sound of a band in the throes of evolution - and they're doing it in style. **CC**

THE MARS VOLTA

The Mars Volta CLOUDS HILL

A powerful, poignant return for prog shape-shifters.

Oh dear. Some fans will definitely be unhappy at the way the first new album in 10 years by guitarist Omar Rodríguez-López and singer/lyricist Cedric Bixler-Zavala has turned out. It's a near certainty that because the duo have had the temerity to follow their muse without asking fans' permission first, toys will be thrown out of the pram with cries of, "But it's not prog!" There's a depressing inevitability to this response as Tony Banks, Mikael Åkerfeldt, Steven Wilson and others will happily confirm.

> **Embracing brevity doesn't result in a lack of gutsy dynamics.**

It's true that *The Mars Volta* is a shift in sound and feel, a tangible change in the way they've done things in the past. The approach here stands in definite contrast to the disorienting fever dreams and pervasive hallucinatory sonics that defines their frenetically eclectic output from their 2003 debut, *De-Loused In The Comatorium* all the way to *Noctourniquet*, their last album before splitting up in 2012. But rather than it somehow representing a betrayal, open-minded listeners should hear and enjoy a different perspective from a team that remain fervently inventive.

The jagged, lung-puncturing staccato attacks may have been dialled down, but on the tumbling beats of *Blank Condolences*, the sputtering disintegration of *Vigil*, or *Qué Dios Te Maldiga Mí Corazon*'s schizoid Latin-infused about-turns, there's that same unrelenting force and purpose. It turns out that embracing brevity and concision doesn't result in any lack of punchy, gutsy dynamics or stirring hyper-driven vocals. If anything, the unerring focus means that everything comes with a kind of short, sharp shock. The rough-hewn beats and serrated guitars slicing through *The Requisition*, the pulsating insistence of *Flash Burns From Flashbacks* or *No Case Gain*'s claustrophobic tunnel vision are all instantly recognisable as authentic Volta. As lyrics dealing with highly personal subjects such as family trauma endured within the Church of Scientology, Bixler-Zavala's yearning, soulful vocals navigate some uncomfortable issues with both nuance and passion.

Shaped and moulded by experience, these songs chronicle the outcomes of personal journeys that haven't always been easy. Given all of this, it's unsurprising that the resulting music explores an emotional space that has necessarily moved on from where they were when it fell apart a decade ago. Is this album different from what's gone before? Yes. Is it somehow inherently inferior to that previous body of work? Of course not. Anyone who thinks *The Mars Volta* might be the sound of a band coasting or in some way resting on their laurels should think again.

SID SMITH

O.R.K

SCREAMNASIUM

The new album from ex-Porcupine Tree bassist **Colin Edwin**, award-winning composer/vocalist **LEF**, King Crimson's **Pat Mastelotto**, and Marta Sui Tubi's **Carmelo Pipitone**.

Screamnasium is O.R.k's most essential album to date, spontaneous yet intricately crafted. Features guest performances from Grammy winning vocal phenom **Elisa** (Django Unchained soundtrack) and virtuoso cellist **Jo Quail**.

Mastered by **Machine** (Lamb of God, King Crimson, Clutch) with artwork by **Adam Jones** (of Tool) and Marvel/DC Comics illustrator **Denis Rodier**

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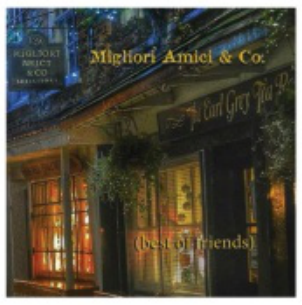
MIGLIORI AMICI & CO

(Best Of Friends) OCMUSIC/VANITY MUSIC GROUP

US duo draw on wide influences as they reach out to muso mates.



An instrumental lockdown project conceived by drummer/vocalist/producer Michael Sciotto and guitarist Ray DeTone, *(Best Of Friends)* is a mini-album of under 40 minutes. A variety of styles are dispatched by the stellar line-up of guest artists (the eponymous "best of friends") who make appearances, including Mark Clarke (Colosseum, Mountain), Adam Holzman (Steven Wilson et al), and Nicky Moroch (Elton John, David Bowie) alongside others.

Listening to individual tracks can be misleading: opener *Sick Shit* is a mid-paced, jazz-influenced, odd-time heavy rocker of a tune, with liberal applications of organ and brief synth and piano interludes. So, it's a band with a penchant for the lighter end of the prog metal spectrum who indulge in a bit of fusion, perhaps? Well, yes and no. *Glasgow Reel* now has the same band giving a rock makeover to some traditional Scottish folk and *Sun* is a showcase for some serious guitar noodling. *Shattered Glass* and *Images* return to more conventional rock tropes, yet utilise great light and shade. This is a record that's hard to get a handle on, but one definitely worth getting acquainted with. **GMM**

MIKE OLDFIELD

Tubular Bells: A 50th Anniversary Celebration CLEOPATRA

New orchestral version of Oldfield's landmark featuring The Royal Philharmonic.

Back in 1974, when *Tubular Bells* had become a phenomenon for Virgin Records, Richard Branson asked Oldfield's pal David Bedford to score an orchestral version. Bedford reckoned his version was flawed and that Branson was "milking it for all he was worth".

The album has since been revisited and reworked a number of times, but for this new version Simon Dobson's arrangement is beautifully played by a top session orchestra. The famous opening section sounds particularly crisp and precise, and Dobson's orchestration follows Oldfield's original lines or adds new counter-melodies and textures. The strings give the opening of *Part II* a sensuous, impressionistic feel.

With his received pronunciation and affected poshness, Viv Stanshall was gently parodic as the original Master Of Ceremonies. Sadly, Brian Blessed hams it up shamelessly here, his bellowing on the 'Piltdown Man' section rendering it virtually unlistenable. But there's much else to like even if it is familiar.

This double set includes *Moonlight Shadow* with Ella Shaw, a chunk of *Hergest Ridge* and an inspired revisiting of side one of *Ommadawn*. **MB**

POLY-MATH

Zenith NICE WEATHER FOR AIRSTRIKES

British quintet hit the prog fusion sweet spot.

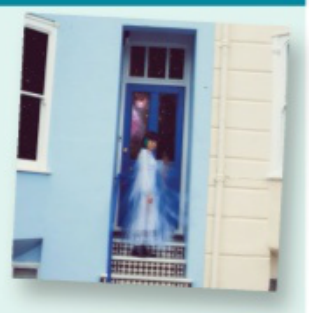
Expanding from a quartet to a quintet with the arrival of saxophonist Chris Olsen, Poly-Math sound positively ferocious on *Zenith*. It sees the group move away from the experimental soundscapes of their earlier work, towards a heavy jazz-prog onslaught. A handy frame of reference would be New York's Rudder, who have the same talent for fiery jazz improvisation over hefty grooves.

Olsen and guitarist Tim Walters seem to be engaged in a competition to see who can produce the wildest, squonkiest sound out of their instrument when they solo. Equally, there are times in *Canticum II* when they lock in with the drums, bass, and keys and the whole band becomes one monstrous rhythm section, stomping out the syncopated hits for maximum impact.

Joe Branton's bass playing is a consistent highlight, laying down thick, knotty grooves that propel everyone else onwards and upwards. *Proavus* is a labyrinth of odd measures and shifting metres, and they switch up the mood with the late night, smoky vibe and *Twin Peaks* twang of *Mora*. Aptly titled, *Zenith* is Poly-Math's best yet, a blast of wonky beats and relentless energy. **DW**

ART-ROCK

Chris Roberts samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.



"*I had a fear of the ordinary,*" begins Brighton-based **Helen Ganya** on the impressive *Polish The Machine* (Bella Union). Her song-based electronica succeeds in transcending it through sheer force of personality. Musically, for all the accompanying hype about its "universal existential pull", it's not a million miles away from some of today's best pop acts, like Mitski, or the darkwave dreaming of Zola Jesus. Yet the grafting of grit onto a glam sonic surface ensures that tracks like the multilayered *Young Girls Never Die* or the sad, propulsive *Wedding In The Night Time* work as both statement and entertainment. The cinematic sweep of the title song swells until its closing minute is akin to Gary Numan's *Cars* driving a furrow through your head. A leap on from 2019's intriguing but tentative *Vanishing Lands*, this is a poised, powerful voice arriving.

There is minimal use of voice on **Fiona Brice**'s spellbinding second full solo album, *And You Know I Care* (Bella Union),

but its every placement counts. Her less-is-more philosophy, previously demonstrated on debut *Postcards From*, has been relaxed for a more confident, expressive work, a post-classical gas. A musician who's played with everyone from Vashti Bunyan to Elbow, she conjures up here a calm yet captivating response to contemporary chaos.

Once mentored by Tom Waits, **Jesca Hoop** is a talented songwriter with a highly individual voice that either appeals or alienates. Fifteen years into an eclectic recording career, *Order Of Romance* (Memphis Industries), produced atypically by John Parish, isn't shy: it's so plate-spinning and busy that the listener's head whirls. At times the over-embellishment and quirky voices are like being trapped in children's TV. When it's less frenetic, and breathes, a hint of Laurie Anderson peeps out. Flamboyant.

Its polar opposite would be the solo debut from **Will Sheff**, frontman of Okkervil River (who may have run their course — he seems unsure himself) and Shearwater co-founder. *Nothing Special* (ATO) may be humble-braggingly named but its pathos and haunted depth are undeniable. He's forsaken "the rock and roll myth" and seeks "a more transcendent reality". Those aren't idle words, though: the whole forlorn canvas sounds like a restrained Mercury Rev examining their bleakest Neil Young albums.

Equally reverie-inducing is a lovely offering from Manchester genre-jumpers **Sylvette**, whose entrancing third album *Single Thread* (Velveteen) recasts them as Nick Drake-John Martyn folk whisperers, with a lick of Talk Talk.

Finally, veteran ex-Strangler **Hugh Cornwell** sings, plays and produces everything on *Moments Of Madness* (HIS), which shows flashes of grumpy wit but is generally too black and white and sane.

O.R.k

Screamnasium KSCOPE

Surprising influences create a cathartic cry from Colin Edwin and co.

Released in 2019, O.R.k's acclaimed third album, *Ramagehead*, was no shy, retiring wallflower of a record, its central focus of "everyday bewilderment brought about by the uncertain times [and] the post-fact environment" driven home by an unsettling mix of industrial tones, prog metal mania and woozy classical atmospherics.

> **Minimal phrases become soaring, Muse-ish wails.**

As commentators on society and politics, things weren't suddenly going to become a breezy picnic, and the four-piece — Colin Edwin on bass, Pat Mastelotto on drums, Carmelo Pipitone on guitars and Lorenzo Esposito Fornasari, aka Lef, on vocals/guitars — were amassing songs for their fourth record when the pandemic hit. Whatever material had been prepared was going to be scrapped. "Something changed in the material we were coming up with," ex-Porcupine Tree bassist Edwin told this writer. "*Screamnasium* is a reflection of how we've been feeling since *Ramagehead*."

That feeling, as the title suggests, is frustration, anger, helplessness, a need for catharsis. This comes across in bold strokes throughout, with ups as well as downs, and a most unusual approach to song construction, even within the framework of prog and prog metal.

As I Leave is a stunning opener, and a marker for the gargantuan-sounding mix by Machine (Clutch, King Crimson, Lamb Of God). Here Lef goes full-throated Chris Cornell against Edwin's fretless runs, Pipitone's huge riffs and Mastelotto's gated donks and taps, a taking-back-control-as-you-walk-out-the-door anthem par excellence. *I Feel Wrong* is a swinging, slide-guitar belter and *Don't Call Me A Joke* hat-tips XTC, O.R.k-style (meaning mucho metal), harking back to Mastelotto's work on *Oranges And Lemons* and loaded with lush harmonies and six-string chimes.

Notes of positivity were important, says Edwin, hence the staccato yet uplifting *Hope For The Ordinary*, and the frantic *Unspoken Words*, influenced by the bassist and guitarist listening to Cardiacs at the time of its writing. *Deadly Bite* is a towering wild card, and the catchiest standout alongside the 80s-Crimson-like *Something Broke*, Pipitone channelling minimal phrases that become soaring, Muse-ish wails.

The liminal zone looms in *Lonely Crowd*, a late-night cry-from-the-soul where Lef tunes into Jeff Buckley's emotional holler. But the best is saved for last with *Someone Waits* as O.R.k experiment with the baroque folk mood of Nick Drake, using prog-classical cellist Jo Quail to augment a string arrangement written for her by Lef. It jumps to a metallic funk, Quail adding sensational sonic fireworks to a surprising, spirited release.

JO KENDALL

RED BAZAR

Inverted Reality WHITE KNIGHT RECORDS

Sleek and catchy tunes from Nottingham quartet.

While Red Bazar were always engaging as an instrumental trio, it was the addition of Tiger Moth Tales multi-instrumentalist/singer Peter Jones that truly elevated them.

Their third studio record with Jones, *Inverted Reality*, proves that better than either of its immediate predecessors. Opener *One Out Of Three* is ripe for an impassioned singalong, as it skilfully blends sophisticated and vibrant playing with what's certainly some of the most alluring melodies Jones has ever sung. Both the Orwellian *State Of Disgrace* and the moody *Spirit Of Man* are energetic delights, too, and cumulatively, their expository narration, brutal guitar riffs and cosmic accentuations bring to mind Unitopia and Southern Empire. The vulnerability of *Smokescreen* means that it's the most emotionally resonant track, whereas the frenzied folk rock musicianship of *Take Control* evokes the 1970s Canterbury scene. Even the slightly formulaic closer, *Stop The World*, is lifted by its gentle piano work and emboldened vocals.

Inverted Reality may be less epic in scope and style than 2019's *Things As They Appear*, but it retains Red Bazar's modern musical magic. **JMB**

BJØRN RIIS

A Fleeting Glimpse KARISMA

Airbag guitarist's shameless Pink Floyd cosplay.

Bjørn Riis' recent solo album, *Everything To Everyone*, found him casting his net wide, showcasing his love of everything from Dire Straits to blues rock-era Whitesnake. By contrast, this four-track follow-up EP flips the script and draws on the influence of a single band: Pink Floyd.

Actually, that doesn't quite cover it. As its *Comfortably Numb*-referencing title suggests, *A Fleeting Glimpse* frequently and knowingly goes beyond homage. Like Victor Frankenstein in brown corduroy, Riis builds new Floyd songs from old body parts. The bucolic *Dark Shadows (Part One)* conjures gauzy, *Fat Old Sun* vibes before mutating into a *Great Gig In The Sky* knock-off, complete with Claire Torry-esque wailing from Floyd and Gilmour backing singer Durga McBroom. *A Voyage To The Sun*'s pulsing vibes bite hard on *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun*, and *Summer Meadows* throws in *Granchester Meadows*-esque birdsong, in case anyone missed the reference.

Floyd fans will have fun playing spot-the-tune, and they're unlikely to complain given that band's dormant status, but the whiff of second-hand nostalgia is ultimately cloying. **DEV**

JAN RIVERA

Existential Paranoia JANRIVERA.BANDCAMP.COM

Stars align on Puerto Rican fusion guitarist's debut album.

Guitarist and music educator Jan Rivera studied at the Guitar Institute of Technology in LA, and his debut album is a selection of deft, dense, guitar-heavy instrumentals that showcase his skill and heady compositional approach, with a phalanx of first-call players around him.

His main drummer, Marco Minnemann, is joined by ex-Zappa sticksman Chad Wackerman on the knowingly Zappa-esque *The Grey Sticky Note*. Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess matches Rivera on the title track and complex *Can't Fight Who You Are*, while bassist Mohini Dey adds stunning work throughout. Jazz-rock icon Gary Husband brings keyboard colour to the lovely, subdued *Morse Code (For Hope)* and bass great Jimmy Johnson enhances the enigmatic *My Friend The [Synic]*.

Polyrhythms and odd metres abound through *Existential Paranoia*. Rivera's rangy guitar style and exotic, theory-savvy note choices evoke John McLaughlin and the master, Allan Holdsworth. To the casual listener it all might sound like a music college sliding noisily into a sinkhole, but fusion fans and guitar geeks will find much on this calling card debut to savour. **GRM**

SHEER CEREBRAL POWER

Sucker Punch'd YELLOWBIRD/ENJA RECORDS

Refreshingly pugilistic art-rock debut.

Sheer Cerebral Power's spread of influences range from Frank Zappa and Rush to Tool and Allan Holdsworth, and *Sucker Punch'd* is such an ambitious and varied introduction to the multinational ensemble.

True to its name, the title track offers a dazzling and forceful starting point, with entwined guitar patterns and off-kilter rhythms yielding a hypnotic backdrop for frontman Jay Jay's Robert Plant-esque singing. It's kind of like a softer take on early Anekdoten, too, and that singular chemistry carries over the shimmering *Jab* and calming *Skip*. Other songs pack more intensity, for example, the desperation and urgency of *Blow* immediately seizes the listener's attention. The crunchy riffs and psychedelic vocal effects of *S.L.A.B. (Sting Like A Butterfly)* are a highlight, while *Boma Yè* is centred around dreamy timbres and tempos, within which it's easy to get lost.

Knowing that every composition is inspired by 1974's famous Muhammad Ali vs George Foreman 'Rumble In The Jungle' boxing match isn't essential to enjoying *Sucker Punch'd*, but the added context makes it that much more of an imaginative knockout. **JMB**

SNARKY PUPPY

Empire Central GROUNDUP MUSIC

Smoothing the excitement with live-in-the-studio recording.

Presumably named after the two-mile stretch of road that joins Dallas' Harry Hines Boulevard with the Stemmons Freeway, *Empire Central* is a daunting listen. It's 95 minutes of live music recorded across eight nights, 20 onstage musicians, and a setlist that twists and tumbles around the notion of genre without sticking to any particular idea for longer than is necessary. And although *Empire Central* doesn't climb the peaks of 2020's *Live At The Royal Albert Hall*, the machine-tooled precision of the arrangements is no less dramatic. This is an album full of imagination, from the lurching, go-slow funk of opener *Keep It On Your Mind*, with horns that jab like striking cobras, to the white-hot guitar that lifts *RL's* towards yet another brassy crescendo. *Belmont* is so smooth it could be The Crusaders, but even then there's a surprise, as a spiralling violin slowly drags the song skywards. And the closing *Trinity* begins with Fripp-esque guitar patterns that slowly wrap themselves around something freakier before it all expires into hazy quiet. Sure, it's all a bit meeker than it could be, jazz fusion for people who don't really enjoy a challenge, but it works. **FL**

SWEET BILLY PILGRIM

Somapolis REPUBLIC OF MUSIC

Sixth from enduringly eloquent art-rock artisans.

This classy, constantly under-appreciated group – now down to the duo of Tim Elsenburg and Jana Carpenter – redirect their sound without sacrificing epic ambition. This is a fabulous, unapologetic concept album, loosely inspired by Wim Wenders' graceful 1987 arthouse movie *Wings Of Desire*, with grandiose themes. Yet it's also playful, rhythmic and not averse to fun. There are blasts of cheery horns; it induces hip-wiggling as often as it asks the listener to adopt a Rodin's The Thinker pose.

The *Somapolis* of the title is described as a "body of the city, or city of the body" and the record sometimes evokes Prefab Sprout if produced by Cecil B DeMille. The voices of Elsenburg and Carpenter interweave like Paddy McAloon and Wendy Smith of the aforementioned sophisti-poppers: in fact, Carpenter now dominates, which shifts Sweet Billy Pilgrim a fair distance from their 2005 beginnings. Elsenburg's stentorian contributions still stun, though.

Made with obvious love and drive, this is both intelligent and felt, the dream/ideal of the 80s new pop fully realised, and it can only be hoped that somebody's still listening. **CR**

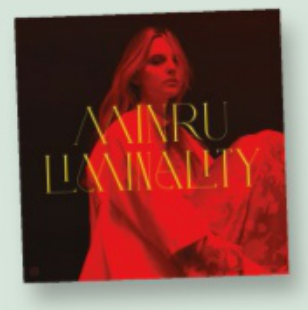
PROGRESSIVE FOLK

Paul Sexton applauds 100 not out for The Guvnor and more new releases!

We begin with the sort of ovation usually afforded to a long and distinguished innings culminating in a well-earned century. **Ashley Hutchings'** many decades at the crease now deliver, almost unbelievably, his 100th album, *Ashley Hutchings Presents More Songs From The Shows* (Talking Elephant), featuring a selection of performances from four distinct projects, both musical and spoken word, presented by the folk master these past half a dozen years.

The record embraces live selections from shows that track the unparalleled career of The Guvnor, from early Fairport days through to his love of literature, theatre and far beyond, acknowledging such presentations as *From Psychedelia To Sonnets* and *Paradise And Thorns*. It captures the sheer conviviality of his concerts and their collaborative spirit, with prominent appearances by Becky Mills and Ash's son, Blair Dunlop. It's a truly irresistible compendium.

The opening track on *Liminality*, the debut album by Berlin-based Swedish native **Minru,** aka Caroline Blomqvist, evokes shafts of morning light cascading into a cathedral, so it's appropriate that it's called *Dawning*. The subtle piano, cello and drum mélange of *Infinity* introduces her delicate vocals and sets the scene for 35 minutes of gentle magic, firmly planted at the base camp between folk and indie sensibilities.



For an album prompted by the loss of a close friend, feelings of pain and loss are admirably overthrown by ethereal and enchanting songscapes.

Banjo may not seem the height of cosmic studio gadgetry, but Australian ambient producer **Andrew Tuttle** gives the humble sound box a makeover on the *Fleeting Adventure* album (Basin Rock). There are digital connections with friends near and far, from Aussie mates Voltfruit to Texan alchemists Balmorhea, French/Swedish violinist Aurelie Ferriere, Spanish guitarist Conrado Isasa and Nashville pedal steel player Luke Scheider. Inviting genre crossings such as *Next Week, Pending* and *New Breakfast Habit* contribute towards a whole new string-driven thing.

French singer and writer Cess Frangi and English producer-composer Graham Pratt have come together in Brighton as **Greenness**. As they prove on their *Sunrooms* debut (One Fern), there must be something in the sea air of that cosmopolitan locale that agrees with their imaginative blend of bilingual alt-folk electronica. They thrive on such delights as the bleeping, yelping *Sphinx*, never straying too far from the shores of acoustic tune craft.

Dan Weltman's *Rivers In My Mind* (Glass Modern) is the first solo endeavour by the Snails frontman. Its folk framework has whisps of country-folk accentuated by subtle pedal steel on *Bound Away* and other gentle songs, the plaintive charm of the lead vocals echoing the rawness of the deserted Devon landscape in which the record was born. Thoughts of Nick Drake and Bill Fay are never too far away.

THRESHOLD

Dividing Lines NUCLEAR BLAST

Thirty-four years in, Threshold still know how to flex.

In the grand tradition of prog bands from Yes to King Crimson, Threshold have endured repeated cases of revolving door syndrome as members have come and gone from the roster over the course of the decades. However, for their 12th studio album the band have hung onto the same personnel from 2017's *Legends Of The Shires*, marking the second release since the prodigal Glynn Morgan rejoined the fold as vocalist after an 11-year absence.

> **There's a kinship with the bands that pioneered prog metal.**

The band have described *Dividing Lines* as the "darker, moodier older brother" of *Legends...* although it's far from a gloomy or downbeat listen. The album kicks off with the energetic riffage of *Haunted* and, in a world where too many prog bands fall into the mid-tempo trap with songs that jog unhurriedly along, Threshold briskly leap that hurdle. The album's energy levels are bolstered by the excellent mix. While it's a modern, robust sound, it's not excessively compressed so there's a good range of dynamics which helps the heavy sections contrast against the quieter moments.

Morgan sounds great, bringing a strident, commanding presence to *Hall Of Echoes*, while *Let It Burn* expresses that aforementioned dark moodiness yet it's delivered with an urgent momentum. There are times when the album leans closer towards neo-prog than prog metal. *Silenced* is a good example and *Lost Along The Way* has something of vintage Marillion about it, particularly in the generous use of reverb. In a different vein, the lyrics of *Defence Condition* have a distinct 80s vibe that feel like a throwback to Cold War-era songs about nuclear destruction.

Stylistically, the album has a spiritual kinship with the bands that pioneered prog metal in the 1980s, namely Queensrÿche and Fates Warning. Like those two heavyweights, Threshold always put the song first, rather than showing off unusual time signatures or shredding as an end unto itself. There's still an abundance of impressive playing, including Richard West's keys solo in *The Domino Effect*, one of the album's two long-form compositions alongside *Defence Condition* that provide a reminder of their prog credentials, and it's interesting to see West lead the song from the keys without sacrificing the heaviness.

It's been five years between studio albums for Threshold and everything about *Dividing Lines* suggests they haven't been resting on their laurels. The music isn't breaking new ground for prog metal, but the quality of the songwriting is impressive throughout, with no trace of any excess fat or filler. The band exude vitality with a confidence and swagger that's readily compelling. Solid as granite.

DAVID WEST

TERAMAZE

Flight of the Wounded WELLS MUSIC

Australia's progressive metallers play safe with their fourth album in two years.

Ever since guitarist and founding member Dean Wells assumed the band's vocal responsibilities in 2020, Teramaze's creative output has been incessant, with this their fourth album in two years. Yet Wells insists that despite the concerns of quantity over quality that such a run of releases may create, they've managed to keep the quality levels up.

Polished, classy and well-rounded with time signature-bending riffs and delicate orchestrations, the Australians barely place a foot wrong here. On *Gold* and *Tickets To The Next Apocalypse* they unite Dream Theater and bright, uplifting neo-prog aesthetics where Wells' voice can soar, and their luminescent songwriting can flourish. On the ballad *Until The Lights* they pack enough details and ever-evolving ideas to give the song more entertainment value than its three-minute playtime would suggest, while the spooky-yet-smiling *For The Thrill* could be a long-lost Coheed And Cambria song.

However, with every carefully placed step, there's a missed opportunity for risk-taking. As pleasant as the album is, a little more derring-do would have gone a long way in turning this solid record into a standout. **POW**

THE UNIVERSE BY EAR

III ONSTAGE RECORDS

Swiss power trio indulge in woozy long-form jams on album three.

On their third album, titled *III* this Swiss trio explore unknown spaces and uncanny depths as they allow their heady, genre-melding sound to unfurl at its own pace. Clocking in at 45 minutes, its five tracks are as expansive as such a concept requires, stretching between six and 12 minutes long without ever overstaying their welcome.

It's a far cry from the quickfire and adrenalised songwriting of 2020's *II*. Instead, the trio have found a mushroom trip addled, mid-tempo pocket to call their home and, all of a sudden, The Universe By Ear are a prog band to be reckoned with. The opening odyssey of *Sail Around The Sun* is to be immersed in as it perpetually evolves through grunting grooves and floating motifs and the focused-yet-freewheeling nature of the power trio ensures these songs develop with a slow-burning intrigue without ever feeling overly drawn out.

Sail...'s calling cards range from stoner riffs, psych jams and harmonised vocal refrains to *Two Hour Drive/Are We There Yet*'s dark, bedevilled blues. Individually, they're excellently explorative tracks; collectively, they make for quite the journey. **POW**

TUSMØRKE

Intetnett KARISMA

Norwegians remain wilfully obscure on their third 'children's album'.

After their 2020 double concept album, *Nordisk Krim*, Tusmørke continue to plough their own idiosyncratic furrow with their third children's album. *Intetnett*'s lyrics are in their native Norwegian, but apparently tell the story of a self-aware computer that possesses schoolchildren's minds and leads to the world slipping into a totalitarian nightmare. Two teachers and a band of rebel pupils join forces with – who else? – the Mesopotamian gods to rid the world of the AI curse.

With old-school bleeps and bloops representing the computer, the band's strong core sound is intact – bright, slightly creepy psych with vocal hooks, floating flutes and vintage guitar tones. Mononymous singer Benediktator remains an engaging presence, vibing nicely with a primary school choir on *Enkis Sang* and *Varslerduett*.

It's impressive that this was written for and performed at a school in Nordstrand in 2017-18; something this darkly imaginative wouldn't make it past a UK school board, and that's a pity. That said, with this being ostensibly for kids and in Norwegian, *Intetnett*'s destined to be just a curio, but that's seems to be just how Tusmørke like it. **GRM**

UNPROCESSED

Gold SPINEFARM

Coming-of-age record for sophisticated German progressive metal quartet.

Three years on from their tech metal/djent-heavy debut album *Artificial Void*, Germany's Unprocessed have returned with a refined, follow-up that blends the band's guitar mastery with intelligent, grounded songwriting. Having released a slew of singles in the interim, tinkering with the ingredients and measurements of their signature brew, the sophisticated *Gold* feels far closer to the finished product.

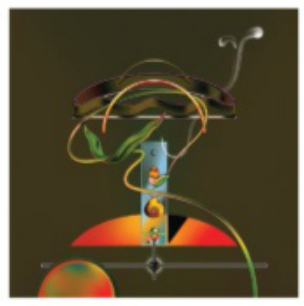
While his mix of math rock, jazz and uncannily winding riffs, leader Manuel Gardner Fernandes has learnt to place his ear-catching playing within catchy, succinct songs. Take *Rain*, which builds atop sultry, onomatopoeic harmonics and a brooding refrain as it progresses with soul and purpose, and the swaying riff of *Redwine*, which mixes R&B with thumping metal and huge pop hooks.

They set the tone for the album's 16 songs, each varying – subtly or overtly – in character to show just how far they've come. *Fabulist* syncopates slick guitars with his rasping vocals and *Dinner* channels gritty, heartfelt Sleep Token elements before *Berlin* combines dance grooves with a Muse-esque chorus of oscillating arpeggios and sky-high vocal melodies to ice a characterful sophomore. **POW**

WAND

Spiders In The Rain (Live) DRAG CITY

Magickal tracks from a pre-pandemic tour revisited.



Love psychedelic rock and prog but haven't checked Wand out yet? That must be rectified immediately, and this live album could be the perfect primer for a deeper dive into their five-album (and one EP) back catalogue.

Recorded by the LA quintet while touring 2019 album *Laughing Matter* over 79 dates, its nine tracks show influences from The Beatles to the Paisley Underground scene (see: *Plum*), with associated acts such as Thee Oh Sees and Ty Segall bubbling at the fringes on tracks such as the wild *Self-Hypgnosis* and the 19-minute *White Cat*. Highly melodic, with Cory Hanson's youthful tenor leading, the quintet also have the assurance to expand, improvise and let the music fly; fluid fuzz guitar, busy synths and snaking bass jams can summon the ghosts of early Velvet Underground explorations, as well as Terry Riley maximalist elan.

Later, *Blue Cloud* brings a little 60s West Coast colour with some dubby bass and jazzy guitar and piano lines weaving some entrancing magic. They finish with fan fave *Melted Rope*, from 2015 album *Golem*; moody moderato shoegazing that's frustratingly short at just the five-minute mark. **JK**

DARRYL WAY

The Rock Artist's Progress SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC/CHERRY RED

Ex-Curved Air man serves up period-piece soundtrack to Swinging London novel.

The Rock Artist's Progress is an interesting addition to the field of multimedia concept projects. A digital-only novel, by ex-journo Charles Shorwell, recounting the tale of a musician's trials and travails in the heady London scene of the late 60s/early 70s, is accompanied by this album – an imagined "lost" collection by a fictional band – by veteran British violinist/composer Darryl Way.

Way also contributes "musical illustrations" via links in the book, creating evocative soundscapes for the reader. With tracks like the borderline glam rock of *Guiding Star*, early Purple strains of *Back On The Road* and frenetic proto-punk of *Mods And Rockers*, the album captures the feel and atmosphere of the era. Marillion's Steve Hogarth provides an achingly well-realised guest vocal on the gentle *Morpheus* and the rocked-up organ and drums of renaissance-styled instrumental *Chaconne* could have been lifted from an early Curved Air album. Even the overall production and sounds seem very deliberately "of the time".

On the downside, the album leans heavily on Shorwell's written narrative and some songs may act as spoilers if listened to prior to reading. **GMM**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

London collective **Dawnwalker** return with their fifth album, *House Of Sand* (Room 132), and while they've filed down the metallic edges this time, they still defy categorisation. Lead songwriter/vocalist Mark Norgate leads a band equally comfortable with sweeping, tough shoegaze (*R.I.P*), eerie spoken word (*The Witness*) and beautifully melodic, pumped-up post-rock (*Repeater*). This is assured, dark stuff with some delicious musical turns — the title track could be the most unsettling Elvis cover ever recorded.

Formed in 2018, **The Round Window** are an English quintet making what they call 'widescreen music', a brand of melodic, hooky rock that nods occasionally to neo and classic prog. Mixed and mastered by Cosmograf's Robin Armstrong, their self-titled debut (theroundwindow.bandcamp.com) is promising stuff. With his clear, natural tone, lead singer Rich Lock carries the songs well. With shows planned for next year, The Round Window may well be worth looking into.

Cymbalic Encounters is a project from US drummer/songwriter Mark Murdock, who was part of original Yes guitarist Peter Banks' band Empire for their *Mark III* record. On *Cerulean Cathedral* (cymbalicencounters.bandcamp.com), Murdock is joined by guests including former Brand X bassist Percy Jones, with a posthumous performance from that band's John Goodsall (he died in November 2021). The fusion is fresh, often funky and clearly cut from vintage cloth, with Tim Pepper's vocals a welcome addition to Murdock's highly agreeably retro instrumentals.

Drummer for Sweden's Hellsingland Underground, **Patrik Jansson** made his one-man album *Game Changer* (Sneaky Foot) during the pandemic. It's more prog-adjacent than prog really, but still a rootsy, bluesy record reeking of the 70s. With his own grooves behind him, Jansson proves to be a gifted guitarist with a soulful voice and real songwriting smarts. Well worth a listen.

Stockholm-based multi-instrumentalist **Nicklas Barker** (Anekdoten/Kosmogon) cites minimalist composer La Monte Young and Eliane Radigue as influences, and these feed into his excellent current solo record, *Epektasis* (Tonbad Grammofon). Recorded in a remote village using two Mellotrons, an ARP Odyssey synth and four looping pedals, this vintage-modern music is utterly entrancing and transportive — *Himlarymderna* is glacially lovely, *Offret*'s imperious, while *Celest Mekanik* is downright terrifying. Barker's a truly skilled and instinctive texturalist.

Finally, there's more minimalism from Hats Off It's Adequate's **Malcolm Galloway**. He was last in this column two years ago with his excellent *Wasp 76b*, and *Patterns* (malcolmgalloway.bandcamp.com) is his sixth solo album in the Steve Reich vein. Far from his Adequate work with Mark Gatland, these are mesmerising explorations of the world of interweaving piano, synth and marimba lines. He's allowed to wear more than one Hat, after all...

BILL BRUFORD'S EARTHWORKS

Random Acts Of Happiness SUMMERFOLD

Welcome return for the dazzling, long out of print, live album.

Bill Bruford has always maintained that his drumming style fell somewhere between rock and jazz. And with regards to his departure from prog supergroup UK in late 1978, he explained that he had a jazz mentality in that he hoped an audience would pay to see him playing something that they maybe hadn't heard before rather than producing a polished, yet predictable, rock set.

> **Bruford was pushing himself further into polyrhythmic areas.**

And this 2004 album, recorded at San Francisco club Yoshi's, has a lot of jazz about it both in the music and that mentality. Bruford's playing may lack some of the audacity and cliffhanging excitement of his work with King Crimson in the 70s, but he was pushing himself further into subtle polyrhythmic areas and the musicians in this version of Earthworks — Tim Garland on saxes, reeds and flute, Steve Hamilton on piano and Mark Hodgson on double bass — have a remarkable empathy. And the fact that this is acoustic music gives their interplay a particular clarity.

My Heart Declares A Holiday has a Latinate swing, with Bruford's restless, yet delicate ride cymbal, snare rolls and tom-tom patterns, the rhythm given sharp turns by his dropped beats. The influence of Chick Corea can be heard in the cascading piano lines on *White Knuckle Holiday*, on which Garland contributes echoed flute and Bruford plays a mean log drum as well as his full kit.

On *With Friends Like These* his drum solo is beautifully played at such speed that those of a sensitive disposition might be forgiven for feeling a little faint. And at a shade under three minutes, it's the perfect length. Garland was then new to Earthworks but makes significant compositional contributions, particularly the smoky, sax-led ballad *Turn And Return*, and his dancing bass clarinet lines lead the quartet into the lengthy *Bajo Del Sol*.

Bruford's own compositional chops and ear for a melody have been apparent from the beginning of his solo career in the late 70s. Earthworks play a lyrical take on *One Of A Kind*, which the drummer wrote with keyboard player and Canterbury scene linchpin Dave Stewart in 1979. And going back to the beginning, there are some repurposed compositions from his 1978 debut solo album, *Feels Good To Me*. On *Seems Like A Lifetime Ago*. Garland's sax takes over from Annette Peacock's line on the original and the one bonus track *Beelzebub* is a treat. Bruford wrote it from the drum rhythm upwards, with Stewart helping out with the voicing of the chords and the harmonies, but its zig-zagging melodic lines, which, oddly, feel like they were scat-sung, still sound strikingly original.

MIKE BARNES

JULIE DRISCOLL

1969 ESOTERIC

Fatally delayed, largely overlooked debut from ex-Trinity siren.

After coming to prominence alongside Rod Stewart and Long John Baldry in Steampacket, Julie Driscoll struck Top 5 gold with Brian Auger And The Trinity's timeless take on Dylan's *This Wheel's On Fire*. East London waif Jools, who started out as Yardbirds' manager Giorgio Gomelsky's secretary, captured the post-mod imagination after cannily reinventing herself. She framed huge eyes with false lashes and expressionlessly smouldered Nico-style. She was Twiggy with a voice.

Yet almost inevitably, stardom didn't suit. She developed a taste for experimental jazz and, shortly after Trinity supported Led Zeppelin in the US, jumped ship (acoustic guitar in tow) to write songs for her solo debut.

Her persistent manager/producer/Marmalade label boss Gomelsky hooked her up with another recent Marmalade signing, jazz pianist/composer Keith Tippett. The pair hit it off professionally and personally (marrying in 1970) and crafted a genre-fluid album of timeless enduring power. *1969* not only features Tippett on piano and celeste, but also an astonishing array of sidemen, Chris Spedding on guitar, along with alumni of Soft Machine, Ian Carr's Nucleus and Blossom Toes. Driscoll's strong, clear tones effortlessly soar and invariably entrance across eight compositions that cry out for change and renewal, not least album opener *A New Awakening*, with its complex horn arrangements (see also: *Walk Down*) and sizzling lead guitar. *Those That We Love*'s acoustic delicacy recalls Sandy Denny, while Karl Jenkins' strident oboe tangles on *Leave It All Behind* are pure Elephant's Memory. Again, *Break Out* speaks for itself, Driscoll hitting freedom-affirming high notes, before less is more on minimalist second side set-pieces (*The Choice*, *Lullaby* and *I Nearly Forgot – But I Went Back*).

Marmalade's collapse saw *1969*'s release delayed, somewhat ironically, until 1971, and Driscoll's moment was lost, but it's an astounding piece of work, impossible to categorise, yet ripe for rediscovery. **IF**

RUPERT HINE

Surface Tension: The Studio Works 1981-1983 ESOTERIC

Compiling three of Hine's early 80s albums – with six bonus tracks.

Probably best known to *Prog* readers as a sometime producer for Rush, much-missed English gentleman Rupert Hine also had a hand in records by Tina Turner, Kevin Ayers and The Waterboys, among countless others. Like fellow producers Brian Eno and Todd Rundgren, he enjoyed a parallel (though less visible) career as a very capable artist in his own right, his unique compositional gifts evident on albums such as 1973's *Unfinished Picture*, and the three typically idiosyncratic LPs featured here.

Newly remastered by Hine's right-hand man Stephen W Tayler, *Immunity* (1981), *Waving Not Drowning* (1982), and *The Wildest Wish To Fly* (1983) demonstrate Hine's thirst for innovation and experimentation. His distinctive, husky voice anchors quirky, often mildly obtuse songs which dared to push fairly primitive electronic tech to its limits, the results always fascinating. *TWWTF*'s *The Saturation Of The Video Rat* sounds both ahead of its time and slightly hamstrung by the technology of the period, but Hine's off on a treasure hunt regardless, fearlessly following his muse.

He and Tayler made this triumvirate of LPs in close collaboration with featured lyricist Jeanette Obstoj, whose darkly intriguing ruminations obviously proved inspirational for Hine. These records were also hugely influential. Kate Bush, for example, thought *Immunity* "very special", and it's not hard to trace a line between *Waving Not Drowning*'s curious opener *Eleven Faces* and Bush's own outlandish innovations on *Hounds Of Love*.

It's indicative of the esteem in which Hine was held that guest players on these records include Phil Collins, Marianne Faithfull, Caravan's Geoffrey Richardson, Eric Clapton/Dire Straits collaborator Phil Palmer and Saga drummer Steve Negus, whose band asked Hine to produce their 1983 album, *Heads Or Tails*. Roop, as he was known to his friends, died in 2020. Stephen W Tayler's restorative work is a fitting tribute to Hine's skewed genius, and to Jeanette Obstoj, who died in 2015. **JMN**

MISTY

Here Again GRAPEFRUIT

First release for a 52-year-old album.

For every band in the late 1960s or early 1970s that enjoyed even a modicum of commercial or even artistic success, there are hundreds who sank without much of a trace save perhaps for a lone, unloved and overlooked album. These days, however, such relics are highly prized and frequently the subject of rehabilitation, redemption and love-struck adoration.

Spare a thought, then, for Misty, a London-based five-piece who released a single and even got as far as making an album but split before their putative long-player saw the light of day. With the surviving acetate from the LP sessions gathering dust for more than five decades, it's only now enjoying some time in the sun.

Managed by showbiz executive Michael Grade long before he was made a knight and lord of the realm, the cigar-chomping impresario lacked any connection to or credibility in the long-haired rock scene to which Misty ultimately aspired. While all the kids were freaking out in Hyde Park to The Rolling Stones in the summer of '69, Misty were playing pop hits of the day to the hotel crowd in Beirut of all places. To Grade's credit, however, he did at least get them into the studio, where they could let their hair down on some original material.

With close vocal harmonies, surging 12-string guitars, and the ever-present rippling Hammond organ, it's clear the group have some instrumental prowess. At times the Bach-infested pseudo-classical arrangements and fashionably shifting time signatures sound a little awkward when pressed up against songs that essentially lean more toward pop or soft rock than any kind of fledgling prog. Nevertheless, moments that evoke The Moody Blues, or occasionally suggest an acquaintance with Pink Floyd's catalogue, add to the period charm. It's unlikely this release will require the era's history to be rewritten but you can't help wondering how things might have been if Misty had been picked up by a label like Vertigo or Charisma. **SS**

STEELEYE SPAN

Live At The Rainbow Theatre 1974 CHRYSALIS

Archive show gets a vinyl outing.

It's possible to tell a lot about a group when they're on stage. It's not just about how well they play. It's about their interactions as players and performers, subtle things that in and of themselves might only be small details but when added together equate to a special chemistry that animates and informs the entire show. What some Steeleye Span fans regard as the 'classic' line-up of Maddy Prior, Tim Hart, Bob Johnson, Rick Kemp, Peter Knight and Nigel Pegrum had buckets of chemistry to go around and it's all over this two-LP set.

Taken from the recent 12-CD celebration of the Chrysalis years, *Good Times Of Old England*, the Rainbow gig captures the energy and commitment of a group really digging deep into their repertoire and repurposing of traditional folk tunes. It's worth remembering that unlike Fairport Convention, who began life as a rock group that wandered into the tangle of folk music, Steeleye Span were right there in the thick of it from day one.

Promoting their recently released, Ian Anderson-produced *Now We Are Six* at this performance, both *Two Magicians* and *Thomas The Rhymer* make it into the setlist. Compared to their studio counterparts, they run with greater fluidity and force, the latter channelling The Who's frenzied windmilling. Maddy Prior's beautiful laser-pure tones sound all the more telling when surrounded by these kinds of sharper edges.

That kind of contrast works especially well on *Long Lankin*'s creeping psych-dirge, a song that brilliantly fuses together several elements while remaining rooted to its origins. Offering a warts-and-all glimpse into a group that were still only five years old at this point, they absolutely own the stage throughout the evening. Institutions come and go, and while the Rainbow Theatre may no longer be with us, the fact that Steeleye Span are still out on the road in 2022 is proof that some traditions are worth preserving. **SS**

GENTLE GIANT

Front Row Centre: US Dates 1976-1980 MADFISH

A giant box of live vinyl.

Despite having called it a day in 1980, a steady trickle of archival releases over the intervening years has served to enhance Gentle Giant's reputation. Following 2019's *Unburied Treasure*, a sumptuous limited-edition 30-disc live and studio retrospective, this limited-edition 10-LP set of the quintet powering through four North American gigs adds another chapter to their ongoing story.

> **The Gentle Giant live experience was that of a band giving their all.**

Like other UK bands at the time, Gentle Giant doggedly attempted to tap into the US market, and, through a combination of hard slog and an ebullient stage show, rippling with an almost precocious level of instrumental virtuosity, their fiery performances garnered them a small but dedicated following despite a somewhat indifferent record company. As is abundantly clear on each of the four LP sets, the Gentle Giant live experience was that of a band giving their all.

Though the music from New York's Calderone Concert Hall on July 13, 1976 has previously been issued on CD, its vinyl debut spread over three LPs typifies the ballsy energy the band regularly dispensed, carpet bombing audiences with brutal riffs or dazzling them with disorientating time signatures and truly impressive dynamic leaps and bounds. The next three-LP set sees them return to Calderone Concert Hall in 1977 supporting their ninth studio album, *The Missing Piece*. Sourced from a previously unreleased tape in guitarist Gary Green's collection, the rapport between audience and band is carried by visceral edge as they sweep briskly through the setlist.

Although the gig at Pennsylvania's Widener College on November 18, 1977 was included in *Unburied Treasure*, here it appears as a two-LP release for the first time. Featuring a photo with the entire band performing a recorder quintet on stage, it shows the wilfully idiosyncratic approach that makes Gentle Giant stand apart from the rest of the groups then doing the rounds. Slipping seamlessly between medieval musicking, five-man drum solos, hocketing and knocking out a polyphonic a cappella canon like they were singing *Johnny B Goode*, nobody rocked the joint like Gentle Giant.

By their appearance at Georgia's Agora Ballroom on May 29, 1980 they'd already decided to quit; however, there's no diminution in the intense onstage forces mustered throughout this double album. Sadly, *Front Row Centre* is only available in North America, a fact that is understandably a gigantic disappointment for eager European fans. Nevertheless, combined with GG expert Alan Kinsman's detailed 60-page book and accompanying photos, this is a satisfyingly weighty package.

SID SMITH

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

High In The Morning: British Progressive Sounds Of 1973

CHERRY RED/GRAPEFRUIT

Three-CD, four-hour set of an era's rock-pop overlaps.

This is a fascinating collection, not just as nostalgia but because it reframes what the future sounded like then. The latest in these inspired year-by-year overviews sees "proper" rock acts of the day wising up to glam rock's reinvention of the single, allowing shrewdly rationed use of the avant-garde to infiltrate the charts and alter the course of previously water-treading careers. So the influences of Bowie, Roxy and T. Rex cause festival rockers to tout their wares via the showcase of sub-five-minute pop gems, and some (like Fantasy's *The Award*) succeed gloriously. Yet there was something in the water encouraging stylised, mannered vocals, a theatrical literacy and a desire to make guitars punchy and pinpoint rather than rambling.

Some of these survive as credible anthems that entered the pop culture, from Roxy Music's *Do The Strand* and Mott The Hoople's *All The Way From Memphis* to Faces' *Pool Hall Richard* and Nazareth's *Broken Down Angel*.

Then there are half-remembered curveballs: Thin Lizzy's *Randolph's Tango* (where Phil Lynott clearly wants to be Rod Stewart), Manfred Mann's Earth Band *Joybringer*, Stackridge's daft *Do The Stanley*. Even Al Stewart wonders if he could surf the wave, offering *Terminal Eyes*, somehow a rip-off of both The Beatles' *I Am The Walrus* and R Dean Taylor's *Gotta See Jane*. Caravan, Greenslade and Hawkwind, in truth, just keep on doing their thing, while Status Quo, with *Caroline*, double down on trusting their own name.

There are genuine salvaged oddities here too. England's Glory were Peter Perrett's first band, pre-The Only Ones, and their Velvet Underground impression is a snarling treat. Perhaps Medicine Head best exemplify the moment, their adorable *Rising Sun* highlighting their shift from Peel hippies to pop-funk Hot Chocolate soundalikes. Few cared what they'd feel like in the morning: that hit train had to be caught! **CR**

FRANK ZAPPA

Zappa '75: Zagreb/Ljubljana ZAPPA RECORDS/UME

Iron Curtain excursion that brought the curtain down on the Mothers Of Invention.

Frank Zappa's links to the former Czechoslovakia have been well documented, although his visit to Communist neighbours Yugoslavia in 1975 has largely gone under the radar until now. Zappa fielded a makeshift band for two shows in Zagreb and Ljubljana. The Mothers' Roy Estrada was coming to the end of his time as regular stalwart bassist, while drummer Terry Bozzio was just beginning, and saxophonist Norma Bell lasted just four months.

Recorded between *Bongo Fury* and *Zoot Allures*, Zappalogists will no doubt be thrilled that this missing link between eras has been unearthed, though how essential *'75: Zagreb/Ljubljana* is in a world where more than 50 live Zappa albums already exist is open to conjecture. The Baltimore-born musician always had exacting standards, though a highly competent *Honey, Don't You Want A Man Like Me?* is knocked into a cocked hat by the version on *Zappa In New York* recorded a year later. That's not to say there aren't moments of interest: an extended 20-minute *Chunga's Revenge* provides plenty, and the jazzy vocalese and improvised brass on *Black Napkins* finds this transitional band in full flow; the sax playing of Napoleon Murphy Brock and the aforementioned Bell are what elevates the group beyond a good blues rock outfit. Fascinating, too, is a stumbling, early outing for *Filthy Habits*, later recorded on 1979 prog fusion masterpiece *Sleep Dirt*.

As for playing the former Yugoslavia, it was a country more relaxed at the time than many might assume, having broken away from the Soviet sphere of influence. Santana, Nazareth and Jethro Tull were just some of the other western bands invited as well as Zappa in 1975, though none of those other groups performed songs about having sex with poodles or Illinois ne'er-do-wells forcing enemas on young women. His unswerving commitment to vulgarity irrespective of his audience was admirable, though it would have taken more than some juvenile filth to upset General Tito's arbiters of decency. **JA**

TWELFTH NIGHT

Fact And Fiction: The Definitive Edition TWELFTH NIGHT

Twelfth Night's finest hour, make no mistake.

Of all the albums that emerged during that so-called second wave of progressive music, the one that gave rise to Marillion, Pallas, Solstice, Pendragon et al, Twelfth Night's 1982 release *Fact And Fiction* still holds a revered place in the hearts of many a prog fan lucky enough to have witnessed the bands from the era in their prime.

It was the Reading quintet's first studio vinyl release, preceded by a handful of cassettes, the last of which, *Smiling At Grief*, received a lavish makeover earlier this year, as well as the celebrated 1981 vinyl album *Live At The Target* (along with the band's 1982 seven-inch, *East Of Eden/Eleanor Rigby*, the first TN material this writer ever acquired).

> **Fact And Fiction left an indelible stamp on progressive music.**

Fact And Fiction elevated Twelfth Night to near mythical status at the time, even while Marillion were snaring themselves a deal with EMI. Even today, its epic tracks *We Are Sane* and *Creepshow* stand proud as two of the finest examples of how younger groups were reinventing prog in the 80s, while the likes of *Human Being*, *This City* and the emotive *Love Song* showed a band unafraid to bring more contemporary influences to the table — a move that saw Twelfth Night dubbed 'Punk Floyd' at the time.

This version of *Fact And Fiction*, dubbed quite correctly *The Definitive Edition*, originally saw the light of day in 2018, and boasts no less than 31 extra tracks. Now available on the band's own Twelfth Night label and featuring new artwork, it contains the original album with bonus material, including that cover of *Eleanor Rigby*; a mixture of live renditions dating between 1983 and 2012; and 1982 demos. Plus a disc of 'covers and interpretations', on which former lead vocalist Mark Spencer shines on *We Are Sane*; Alan Reed and Kim Seviour's *Love Song* is lent more poignancy given the personal troubles the latter has endured recently; peers Pendragon bring a sprightly energy to *Human Being* and Tim Bowness exposes the frailty of *This City*.

History shows that *Fact And Fiction* is the ultimate Twelfth Night studio release from the ultimate Twelfth Night line-up, not least because much-loved vocalist, the late Geoff Mann, took his leave less than a year after its release. Only the electrifying *The Ceiling Speaks* and epic *Sequences* (from 1983's *Live And Let Live*) along with the 1988 recording of *The Collector* — by the Battersby, Devoil, Mann, Mitten, Revell line-up — and a new take on *Love Song*, offer tantalising glimpses of what might have been had he stuck around.

Despite the ensuing feeling that circumstances conspired against the band in their later years, with *Fact And Fiction* Twelfth Night left an indelible stamp on progressive music. **JERRY EWING**

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AMORPHIS – THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY

Markus Laasko SVART PUBLISHING

The accidental rise of Finland's prog metal mainstays.

Markus Laasko's authorised biography of Amorphis is hefty, remarkably thorough and often very funny. It's clear it was originally intended for Finnish fans, as the text is sprinkled with references to local culture likely to be lost on most English-language readers. But that's a minor quibble, and Laasko's prose, translated by Katri Mäkinen, is lively and brisk.

The portrait of the underground Finnish metal scene in the 1980s is fascinating, with its network of fanzines and albums traded on cassettes. Given how successful Amorphis have become, it's surprising to discover just how much their career was unplanned.

Their origins were haphazard to say the least – even the name came from an accidental misspelling of 'amorphous'. With extensive contributions from members past and present, Laasko effectively captures the personalities of the group, the interpersonal and musical clashes, and the inspirations that drove their evolution from thrash to prog metal.

As self-deprecating Finns, Amorphis never expected to accomplish much of anything beyond getting drunk and having fun. Laasko's book is a reminder that despite bad record company contracts and hangovers, sometimes the pieces just fall into place. **DW**

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

Opher Goodwin SONICBOND

Exploring an enigma, song by song.

A Beefheart fan of 54 years, Goodwin's prose style is a little dry, but that's kind of the way with the On Track series. His book works well regardless, functioning as a useful primer and compass as we navigate Don Van Vliet's fractured, label switching, much divvied-up and re-compiled discography.

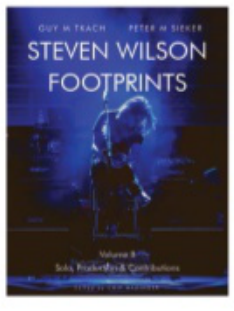
The author sets each album up nicely. We learn exactly where Van Vliet's hyper-imaginative head was at as he and different Magic Band incarnations embarked upon each record, and there are some lovely details along the way. PJ Harvey's late-period friendship with Beefheart is charted in an extended entry on *Bat Chain Puller*'s standout track *Tropical Hot Dog Night*, and Goodwin flags up a White Stripes cover of *Party Of Special Things To Do* that had *Prog* scurrying to YouTube (it's ace).

Sections on all kinds of rare recordings and Beefheart-related texts round out a labour of love, and it's nice to learn that some of the live bootlegs circulating – *Translucent Fresnel*, *Easy Teeth* – are as outlandishly titled as the official Beefheart stuff. Goodwin's favourite Beefheart song? That's *Big Eyed Beans From Venus*, from 1972's *Clear Spot*. Good call, sir. **JMN**

STEVEN WILSON: FOOTPRINTS VOL II

Guy M Tkach & Peter M Sieker GP PUBLISHING LONDON

Everything you ever wanted to know about Mr Wilson and then some.



Subtitled *Solo, Production & Contributions*, the second volume of *Footprints* is an exhaustive catalogue of Steven Wilson's solo career outside of Porcupine Tree, including his ambient Bass Communion project and the experimental IEM. At over 1,500 pages, it lists live dates; details of every release, major and minor; and is peppered with quotes from Wilson and people he's worked with, including Fish.

The decision to include every news announcement posted on Wilson's website results in a lot of repetition with a near endless stream of press releases that don't offer much insight. Likewise, there are transcripts of Wilson's onstage chatter from solo performances, and screengrabs of Wilson's Q&As on Instagram. That's all remarkably, if not obsessively, detailed but it doesn't make for the most compelling reading experience.

More interesting, however, are the longer sections of prose that offer some insight into Wilson's working methodology and what ignites his excitement to make music. It's generously illustrated with live photos, ticket stubs and gig posters. This makes for a truly comprehensive reference encyclopaedia for Wilson completists and all proceeds from the book are going to charity. **DW**

IN THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING: KING CRIMSON AT 50

Toby Amies PANEGYRIC

Candid visual portrait of a band in motion.

It's often said that music can change lives. Sometimes that can be hard to quantify but director Toby Amies' 80-minute documentary, subtitled *King Crimson At 50*, provides many concrete examples through the testimony of King Crimson members past and present. Amies' method of posing questions off-camera in a friendly, relaxed, and disarming fashion draws out a deeper response than might otherwise be achieved in a formal setting. The current band answer questions wandering along corridors, ensconced in dressing rooms or tour buses or waiting to soundcheck. More often than not they talk candidly about the changes in their professional, and sometimes private lives that stem from King Crimson's hothouse environment.

> **It's a personal, poetic view rather than a filmed Wiki page.**

Structurally the film is largely unencumbered with the dead weight of chronology or the band's labyrinthine history. The canonical albums are not dissected or duly assessed. Refreshingly free from celebrity admirers sharing their particular epiphanies, the focus is on the here and now. It's not so much about King Crimson as it is about the experience of *being* in King Crimson with everything that entails.

Having been invited by Fripp to make the documentary in the first place, Amies frequently bumps up against Fripp's unwillingness to actually take part and one can almost feel Amies' pain. However, there's no shortage of Fripp's waspish wit or pithy commentary. In one hilarious moment, as Amies talks to Jakko Jakszyk at a soundcheck Fripp, in shot in the background, shouts from across the stage urging Jakko to "tell him he's talking shite", clearly exasperated at what he regards as Amies' lame line of questioning. Even as Jakko formulates a reply Fripp impatiently butts in with, "There's an even better answer than that," as he takes over the interview. Brief contributions from ex-members, including Michael Giles, the late Ian McDonald, Jamie Muir, Bill Bruford, Trey Gunn and Adrian Belew, add context but occasionally distract from the film's sense of a band that's very much on a mission.

As might be expected, this is also an intensely serious documentary. Bill Rieflin's poignant reflections on his terminal cancer diagnosis and why making *this* music continued to be important in the face of his own imminent death provides a moving counterpoint. It's a highly personal and endearingly poetic view of Crimson rather than a filmed Wikipedia page that comes with a perspective that's as quirky and as willfully idiosyncratic as the subject itself.

SID SMITH

Take a bow

PORCUPINE TREE

VENUE	AUDITORIUM THEATRE, CHICAGO, USA
DATE	20/09/2022

Late last year, progressive behemoths Porcupine Tree announced their big comeback. After being apart for more than a decade, they're finally back on the road, on their first tour in 12 long years, promoting the acclaimed *Closure/Continuation*. The energy in Chicago's beautiful Auditorium Theatre is palpable as they take the stage.

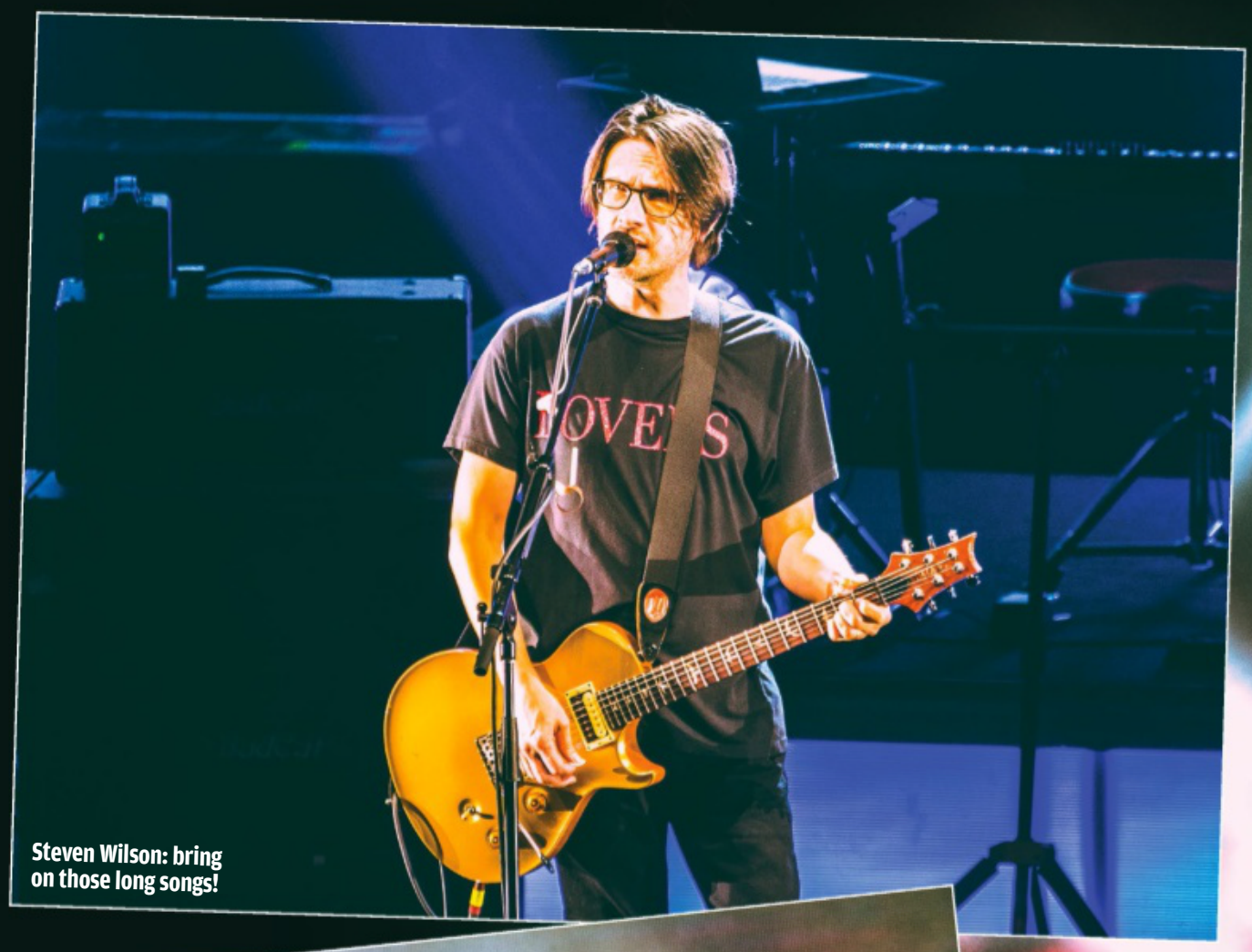
Porcupine Tree receive the sort of welcome that's usually reserved for the gods. Opener *Blackest Eyes*, from 2002's *In Absentia*, sets the tone for what's to come: fans rise from their seats and don't sit back down for the entirety of the two-set performance. Frontman and guitarist Steven Wilson says he hopes they're ready for a long night of music and we all rowdily approve, much to his satisfaction.

Although Wilson confesses that he and his bandmates are unwell on this rainy September evening – something he jokes always seems to happen by the time they reach Chicago – the live quintet are utmost professionals and push through, feeding off the auditorium's energy and rising to every occasion.

The setlist features *Closure/Continuation* almost in its entirety, with lead single *Harridan* one of the standouts. The song has a decisive John Wetton-era King Crimson bass line carried out tonight by new boy Nate Navarro and a vocal melody by Wilson. The first set is crammed with more standout tracks from the current record, including *Rats Return*, which packs a punch and features mean tritone riffs from Wilson and new live guitarist/backup vocalist Randy McStine (McStine & Minnemann), and notable creative rhythms from drummer Gavin Harrison (King Crimson, The Pineapple Thief). Harrison remains workmanlike throughout the show and his hard-hitting technical prowess and creativity retain the audience's full attention.

> **"Porcupine Tree may be getting older, but they're still at their peak."**

As fantastic as the music sounds, Porcupine Tree's visuals are just as astounding and immersive. New track *Herd Culling*, which has all the makings of an instant classic, is enhanced by a first-person video of someone running away from a red-eyed,



Steven Wilson: bring on those long songs!

Gavin Harrison, he's a master of creative rhythms.

TAYLOR NETTNIN

bloodthirsty wolf. The longserving Richard Barbieri provides a multitude of layered synth sounds that really add to the song's (and video's) haunting quality. Wilson paints a creepy picture with his lyrics, '*Son, go fetch the rifle now, I think there's something in the yard*' and it finishes with a furious guitar solo that sounds like it could have been on Pink Floyd's *Animals*.

Wilson wears his guitar strap low and roams around barefoot, giving off something of a grunge vibe. Although Porcupine Tree are progressive in every sense, the raw spirit of Kurt Cobain lingers too; their sound fluctuates from pristine to livewire, and it's those ebbs and flows that make the fans hoot and holler throughout the show. Wilson mentions there are some notes he isn't destined to reach this evening and jokes about an unnamed but notable musician who blames an off-note vocal "on the AC, the alcohol and cocaine". The punchline receives an eruption of laughter, yet despite his current illness, Wilson's performance is of a high calibre and remains so as the show progresses.

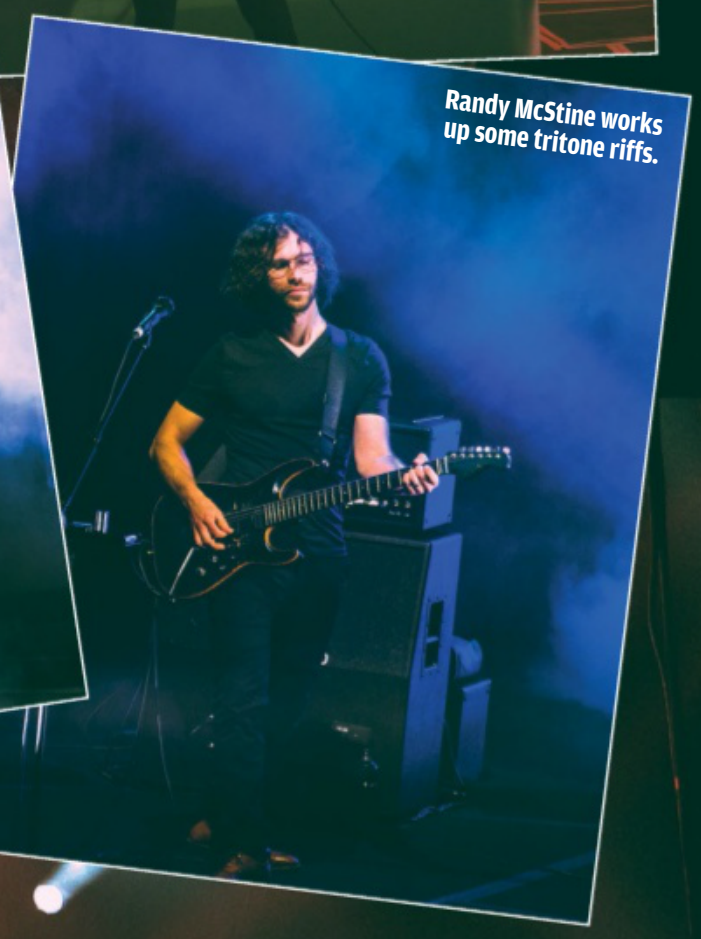
The highlight of the night comes towards the end of the second set when Wilson asks the crowd if they "want something long?" Porcupine Tree then break into *Anesthetize* from the 2007 album *Fear Of A Blank Planet*. The near-18-minute epic with multiple passages starts by putting the audience in a trance with a slow, Tool-like build before it moving into a headbanging section and then back to a soothing build-down as Wilson's melody is backed by a steady groove from Harrison. It takes the crowd on a journey into dystopia. '*We're lost in the mall, shuffling through the stores like zombies,*' sings Wilson to an audience that hangs on his every word.

The evening wraps up with an encore of *In Absentia* favourites *Collapse The Light Into Earth* and *Trains*, which provide a sombre tone and loving farewell to an enjoyable performance, leaving the audience glowing with smiles. Tonight, we witnessed one of modern prog's finest bands putting on a true exhibition of their talent. Porcupine Tree may be getting older, but they're still at their peak.

TREVOR WOODS

Richard Barbieri and Steven Wilson: grunge swagger meets layered synths.

Nate Navarro brings the killer bass lines.



Randy McStine works up some tritone riffs.

Porcupine Tree: still one of modern prog's finest bands.

Take a bow

JUSTIN HAYWARD

VENUE	WHITE ROCK THEATRE, HASTINGS
DATE	23/09/2022

With The Moody Blues dormant since the retirement of the late Graeme Edge four years ago, any sign of Moodies-related activity is welcome. Following on from bandmate John Lodge's Classic Moody Blues Hits tour of North America earlier in the year, the band's singer, Justin Hayward, is wrapping up his own 10-date solo tour in the UK. Speaking in the local paper during the buildup, he talks gratefully of having played music professionally for 55 years and, pertinently, is still engaged in writing new chapters.

A real sense of warmth and fuzziness fills the air as Hayward arrives alone at the White Rock, acoustic guitar in hand, for *The Eastern Sun*, a solo track from 2013. One by one the other members of a drummerless band, including latterday Moodies bandmate and keyboardist Julie Ragins, guitar wizard Mike Dawes (who opens the show) and flautist Karmen Gould, arrive to join in for *Driftwood*, *Tuesday Afternoon*, *The Actor* and *Hope And Pray*, a raft of tracks from The Moody Blues songbook. *The Actor*, with Ragins and Gould providing a delightfully mellifluous and prog-friendly backing, is an absolute joy to hear.

Amazingly, as Hayward croons the fragile *The Western Sky* at a volume so delicate the opening of a packet of crisps might drown out an important detail, to the consternation of those around him a guy three or four seats down from *Prog* pulls out his mobile phone and actually calls a cab – there's always one selfish idiot, isn't there?

Oblivious to the kerfuffle at the back of the stalls, Hayward continues with another Moodies gem, *The Voice*, before introducing a first new single in two years. Although recorded earlier this year, *Living For Love* fits like a comfy old slipper.

Hayward pays tribute to the passing of Queen Elizabeth II ("I remember the coronation!") and wishes "all the best" to King Charles III. His between-song chatter – which touches upon childhood in Swindon ("that place you drive past on the M4 and never stop, unless you're interested in the Great Western Railway"), working with tape operators wearing lab coats and visiting the United States for the first time in 1968 – borders on waffle but contains some nice moments.

Into the home straight, *Forever Autumn*, the song he sang on Jeff Wayne's *Musical Version Of War Of The Worlds*, is followed by another clutch of Moodies greats: *Never Comes The Day*, *Your Wildest Dreams*, *Question*, the evergreen *Nights In White Satin*, *The Story In Your Eyes* and a triumphant *I Know You're Out There Somewhere*.

Signing off alone with his own *Blue Guitar*, Hayward's assertion that "the music of our youth stays with us all our lives" has never rung more true.

DAVE LING

BIG BIG TRAIN

VENUE	WATERSIDE THEATRE, AYLESBURY
DATE	02/09/2022
SUPPORT	DIM GRAY

When Big Big Train played a triumphant end-of-tour show at Hackney Empire in November 2019, all seemed set fair for their continuing rise, with dates scheduled for Europe and the US in 2020. But then came the pandemic and in a brief window between lockdowns they recorded 2021's Top 40 album *Common Ground*, and this year's excellent *Welcome To The Planet*.

But the biggest calamity came in November 2021, with the tragic death of vocalist, co-lyricist and multi-instrumentalist David Longdon, an event that could have finished the group. Their decision to carry on was deemed by all concerned something that Longdon would have wanted. And so, with the recruitment of vocalist-guitarist-keys player Alberto Bravin, that resolution is vindicated by tonight's emotionally charged and powerful full return to the stage.

In anticipation of the main event, the audience take support band Dim Gray to their hearts, and although the young Norwegian art-rockers look delighted but surprised by their standing ovation, it's well earned. Their dramatic, melodic music has a stylistic overlap with fellow Scandinavians Sigur Rós and Mew. Keyboard player Oskar Holldorff's sweet tenor soars over panoramic synths and rotating drum patterns on *Avalon | The Tide*, and although they play without the string section that features on their second album, *Firmament*, BBT's new violinist-vocalist Claire Lindley embellishes the spangly guitars of *Cannons*.

When Big Big Train take the stage it initially feels disorienting and a little uncomfortable without Longdon. It can't be easy for operatically trained, ex-PFM vocalist Bravin to step into the shoes of such a well-loved frontman, but he's a characterful vocalist – and no like-for-like swap – who already inhabits the songs. And although he's probably not as relaxed as he appears, he enjoys some witty back-and-forth with the Passengers, who give the group standing applause after most songs. There's a tangible sense of relief and appreciation for BBT taking their first steps after the worst of times.

Only three of the musicians in this seven-piece line-up – founder and bassist Gregory Spawton, drummer-vocalist Nick D'Virgilio, and guitarist, vocalist and keyboard player Rikard Sjöblom – remain from 2019. But the new members – Lindley and guitarist Dave Foster – seamlessly slip into their roles with Dim Gray's Holldorff rising to the Olympian challenge of covering for absent keyboardist-vocalist Carly Bryant.

> **"Nick D'Virgilio encourages us to sing along. 'Tears of happiness and sadness/Let them flow'. And for many, they do."**

The set covers BBT's full range from the melodic exuberance of *The First Rebreather* – featuring five-part vocal arrangements and their flat-capped brass section – to the epic *Atlantic Cable*. In the lengthy instrumental section they achieve a thrilling collective momentum, like Genesis' *The Cinema Show* with fuel injection. Each musician expresses themselves without grandstanding, and Holldorff and Sjöblom engage in a flamboyant synth and funky Hammond duel on the lengthy, episodic *A Mead Hall In Winter*.

Unbelievably, this is only BBT's 16th show since 2015; they play with the tightness and brio of seasoned old hands, mid-tour. As well as their signature prog pastoralia, they explore new territory: sections of D'Virgilio's *Bats In The Belfry* sound like The Grimethorpe Colliery Band playing Zappa. They finish with the exultant instrumental *Apollo* – Longdon's flute lines played on keyboards – and encore with *The Last Eleven*, the first new song recorded

Nick D'Virgilio and Rikard Sjöblom let those tears of happiness flow.

MIKE HELLER

All change here! Big Big Train return to the stage with a revised line-up.

with Bravin, who gets a huge cheer when the bandmembers are introduced.

Longdon is still in the music, and specifically when D'Virgilio comes out stage front with a guitar and announces that he's going to sing one of his favourite BBT songs, Longdon's *Telling The Bees*. "We miss him dearly but he has left us some amazing gifts," he says, duetting with Sjöblom on keyboards and encouraging us to sing along. '*Tears of happiness and sadness/ Let them flow.*' And for many, they do.

MIKE BARNES

Rikard Sjöblom's keys are electrifying!

New boys Alberto Bravin and Dave Foster trade licks.

A heartfelt moment between Bravin and D'Virgilio.

Big Big Train: their journey continues.

THE MARS VOLTA

VENUE	METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE PHILADELPHIA, USA
DATE	27/09/2022

The Mars Volta were among the greatest prog/jazz rock groups of the 2000s, so this comeback show is heavily anticipated. Comprising mostly of classic compositions – as well as some tracks from their terrific new self-titled album – this impeccably performed and endearingly nostalgic evening makes for a triumphant return.

Given that *The Mars Volta* deviates from its predecessors by emphasising a simpler and more accessible sound, the band surely know that it's divisive. That said, their decision to play only its singles *Graveyard Love* and *Blacklight Shine* is a bit odd. Fortunately, they're two of the best cuts from it, as they highlight the group's knack for elegantly hooky songwriting and inventively sophisticated – yet approachable – arrangements. Vocalist Cedric Bixler-Zavala dedicates the former tune to an old friend whom the ensemble "miss and love," which is a nice touch.

Tonight's concert is as much a commemoration of their latest LP as it is their 20th anniversary, so they pull out numerous older gems too. In fact, roughly half the setlist consists of material from their 2003 debut, *De-Loused In The Comatorium*, with the hyperactive *Roulette Dares (The Haunt Of)* and the heartrending *Eriatarka* appearing early on. Shortly thereafter, the danceable *Drunkship Of Lanterns* and *Cicatriz ESP* show up, and the band even close the night with the album's penultimate ballad (*Televators*) and opening duo (*Son Et Lumière* and *Inertiatic ESP*).

Some subsequent collections get attention too, such as 2006's *Amputechture* (via *Vicarious Atonement*) and 2012's *Noctourniquet* (via *Empty Vessels Make The Loudest Sound*). They go over well, further exemplifying The Mars Volta's perpetual innovation and variety, yet both are outdone by the three picks from 2005's *Frances The Mute*: *The Widow*, *L'Via L'Viaquez*, and mesmerising opener *Cygnus... Vismund Cygnus*.

Adding to their captivating sounds are equally enthralling sights, with an intricate array of lights shifting colour and movement to fit the vibe of each track. From the golds and pinks that encase *Eriatarka* to the deep reds of *Roulette Dares (The Haunt Of)* and *L'Via L'Viaquez*, it's a lively presentation.

The lack of anything from 2008's *The Bedlam In Goliath* and 2009's *Octahedron* is disappointing – especially since the band chose to spend a lot of time on abstract instrumental segues – but it's difficult to complain when they play so much exceptional material. Beyond providing nearly two hours of fascinating music and visuals, The Mars Volta reward longtime fans with plenty of nostalgia. It's a wonderful reminder of why The Mars Volta have always been extraordinary.

JORDAN BLUM

Take a bow

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL

VENUE	FERNHILL FARM, COMPTON MARTIN
DATE	17/08/2022-20/08/2022

The UK's premier post-rock, math rock and prog festival is finally back! It's been three years since ArcTanGent has graced Fernhill Farm, but thankfully the now four-day get-together is making up for lost time with its biggest capacity yet: a stellar 10,000 people. Everyone's all smiles as the festival opens for a warm-up on Wednesday, and the joy refuses to fade until long after the entertainment wraps up on Saturday.

For prog fans, there are countless acts to catch across the weekend. Headliners Opeth bring their 70s-inspired grandeur to close the final day, and there's also the psych-prog of Boss Keloid, Caspian's fluttering post-rock, TesseracT's off-kilter anthems, and Emma Ruth Rundle and AA Williams with their gorgeously experimental dark rock. The bill's so stacked there's scarcely time to top up your beer.

Arriving in the Elephant In The Bar Room after Dvne's main stage metal attack, **Worriedaboutsatan**'s atmospheric and electronic post-rock is the ideal palate cleanser. There's not much to see bar Gavin Miller fiddling with dials, but close your eyes and you'll be dropped into a sound bath of gentle beats and clean guitar.

The atmospheric approach of **Coldbones** to today's eclectic mix of bands is welcomed warmly. The three-piece make it so easy to sink into their progressive, metal and shoegaze cocktail – before long a sea of bodies is swaying along with this enlightening and emotional performance. The only criticism here is the need for a longer set.

The enlightening and emotional Coldbones.

The awesome Alcest: not to be missed.

Welcome back to Maybeshewill!

Ones to watch: France's Bruit.

Sadly, **Boss Keloid** don't draw the biggest congregation to ArcTanGent's third stage. That should be a crime, considering the Wigan quartet's heavy prog mixes all the bounce of the genre's greats with some psychedelic flair. Cuts from last year's *Family The Smiling Thrush* dominate this triumphant set.

Swathed in black, **AA Williams** manages to create an atmosphere of intensity and darkness far contrasting to the blinding sunlight outside the tent at her relatively early spot in the daytime. Her presence demands respect before even uttering a word and the moody, minimalist progressive rock has everyone on tenterhooks.

AA Williams creates an intense atmosphere.

Alcest's Stéphane 'Neige' Paut's soaring vocals combined with an experimental mix of black metal, shoegaze and progressive rock almost brings the tent to complete silence as the audience are simply in awe. Credited with pioneering this genre fondly dubbed "blackgaze", French duo Neige and Jean 'Winterhalter' Deflandre are joined by the live bandmembers Pierre 'Zero' Corson on guitar and backing vocals and Indria Saray on bass to add an extra depth and dimension to Alcest that ensures their live show is not to be missed, nor forgotten.

There was a point where *Prog* thought it'd never happen again, but Leicester's post-rock idols **Maybeshewill** have come to their home away from home for the fourth time, despite breaking up back in 2016. We have the 2021 reunion album *No Feeling Is Final* to thank for getting these heroes back, and a packed second stage shows its appreciation by roaring in delight when *Zarah* and *Refuturing* flaunt their beauty. Equal parts symphonic, electronic and post-rock music, they demonstrate why John Helps and co were so sorely missed. The quintet perform in the densest fog this tent can muster, to the point where Helps is essentially invisible. Although there's still visual splendour to be enjoyed, it's mostly courtesy of bassist Jamie Ward, who's unafraid of a good spin kick to accompany his band's biggest crescendos. *Co-Conspirators*, from 2009's post-metal *Sing The Word Hope In Four-Part Harmony*, shows off a crushingly heavy prog bounce. Then comes *He Films The Clouds Part 2* for an awe-inspiring finale. The only track Maybeshewill play that has lyrics gets every word sung by a capacity crowd.

TESSERACT: ARCTANGENT PRESS/JEZ PENNINGTON. BRUIT: ARCTANGENT PRESS/DEREK BREMNER
AA WILIAMS/COLDBONES/ALCEST/MAYBESHEWILL/MONO/ALPHA MALE TEA PARTY/CASPIAN: DUNCAN EVERSON

Alpha Male Tea Party: math-rock genius!

Back on UK soil: the mighty Caspian.

TesseracT's Daniel Tompkins whips the crowd into a frenzy.

> **"When the crew begin to tear down the stage there's a sense of no one wanting to leave. TesseracT have just set the bar for how to headline ArcTanGent."**

It's a spectacle that's well deserved. Welcome back, lads — now please never leave us again.

On a festival bill saturated by atmospheric, melancholy bands, **Jakub Zytecki**, who kicks off proceedings on the Friday, stands out as bringing upbeat fun to the festival. His joyous, meandering guitar work gets everyone's feet moving and the soaring buildups to intricate, busy choruses are nothing short of stunning. A true highlight of today's line-up.

Troubles during soundcheck delay **Bruit <** by 25 minutes, eating into more than half their allotted time. However, their very brief set is a snippet of symphonic post-rock at its heartstring-plucking best. Also, the mix is flawless. If and when they return to the UK, these Frenchmen are ones to watch.

ArcTanGent veterans **Blanket** bring intricate soundscapes and a melancholic atmosphere to today's set, which sees their progressive post-rock blends lulling the crowd into an appreciative trance. The occasional loud guitar pierces their serenity, and particular praise goes to Aiden Baldwin, who absolutely perfects ambient drumming.

Alpha Male Tea Party almost had to pull out of today's set on account of having all of their gear stolen mere days before the show, but thank fuck they made it happen. Their comedic stage presence seems a defensive front but it can't cover up the math rock genius on display.

Caspian may be playing their first show outside of the US in more than three years, but the instrumental post-rockers show no sign of rust. The quintet are technically still on tour to promote 2020's *On Circles*, but it's 2009 cut *The Raven* that seduces ArcTanGent into their world, luring with ever-escalating arpeggios that peak in harsh, grinding riffs. An intermittent saxophone player is met with rapturous cheers whenever he rocks up, and injects extra emotion into what's already a dulcet 50-minutes.

The last time **MONO** graced the UK, they had a string sextet behind them and Alcest supporting them. Their festival show doesn't carry the same bells and whistles, although it's instantly apparent they don't need them when *Ashes In The Snow* opens. The instrumental giant, lifted from the marvellous *Hymn To The Immortal Wind*, is as utterly gorgeous as it is ear-splittingly loud. It sets the stage for a set chock-a-block with patient yet enrapturing post-rock. And, while there's not much to look at bar four musicians on stage, close your eyes and you'll be whisked away to the most majestic landscapes the mind's eye can conjure.

MONO create some majestic landscapes.

For some reason, tonight seems to be more special than the average show for progressive metal titans **TesseracT**. Vocalist Daniel Tompkins addresses the crowd warmly, and the band hold expressions of admiration and gratefulness for the entire set. The light show is truly something else — rainbow laser beams are cast across the walls of the tent as the audience scream lyrics in unison and the feeling is that of utter unity and love for the band, the festival and the current company.

The trio of *Concealing Fate* parts whips the audience into a frenzy — one which TesseracT's performance truly warrants tonight. Fresh from the writing process, the band treat their fans to a new track in the form of *Natural Disaster*, which combines all the best riffs, soaring vocals, polymeters and adventurous songwriting that TesseracT are most renowned for. This new material is fantastic, but still outshone by old favourites such as *Singularity* and *Nocturne*, which showcase guitarists Acle Kahney and James Monteith working in perfect tandem with one another. Following closing track *Juno*, when the crew begin to tear down the stage, there's a sense of no one wanting to leave the remarkable experience they've all just shared. TesseracT have just set the bar for how to headline ArcTanGent.

Saturday openers **Thumpermonkey** clash with the progressive, psychedelic doom of **Garganjua** and, both musically and in crowd size, they just can't compete. Their prog metal is enjoyably groovy but adds nothing new to the genre. On a bill with as many forward-thinking musicians as this one, it feels like their scene's left them behind.

The Hirsch Effekt don't draw a massive crowd either, with the trio not being as popular in the UK as they are in their native

Jo Quail: far more than just a cellist.

The mesmerising Emma Ruth Rundle.

Leprous steal the weekend... almost!

Germany. However, their marriage of math rock, punk, prog and jazz screams that they should be — and that they're among the most inventive bands in the game.

On a mission to showcase exactly why the prog metal band's explosion out of Finland has been so well noticed, **Wheel** confidently power through their set, jumping through time signatures as though they're going extinct. Their explosive songwriting is the perfect accompaniment to the day's feel-good vibes.

Some might be forgiven for lumping cellist **Jo Quail** into the classical genre, but the reality couldn't be further removed. Her brooding layering of melodies is quite the spectacle and she paints with sound through the use of looping.

US singer-songwriter **Emma Ruth Rundle** stripped her soundscape down to just acoustic guitar and piano on last year's *Engine Of Hell*, and does the same when she plays the album in full at ArcTanGent. Using just her voice and one of two instruments, with no backing musicians or frills, she reduces the crowd to silence with just her gorgeously sullen voice. A guest spot from Jo Quail makes *Citadel* the set's apex.

Without question one of the heaviest bands appearing at this year's festival, **Pallbearer** take no prisoners when they descend on the stage. Do not make the mistake of dismissing them based on utter brute force though, as they exhibit sheer mastery with their progressive buildups and crushing choruses, and they show that their songwriting skills far exceed their reputation. The sheer volume emanating from the tent is astounding, but they take their audience on a meandering adventure through their sound that can only be truly understood when you're soaking in the aura in the person.

> **"The bill's so stacked there's scarcely time to top up your beer."**

Norwegian art-rockers **Leprous** could be the best live band in this genre, and their 50 minutes on the second stage threaten to steal the weekend. *Slave*, *The Price* and *From The Flame* — all of which balance ridiculous time signatures with radio-worthy choruses — are the highlights of yet another indomitable performance.

Finally touring in support of 2019's *In Cauda Venenum* after you-know-what put paid to their original dates, **Opeth** end this year's ArcTanGent with a 90-minute prog extravaganza. The Swedish masters lack the light shows, fog and kitchen sinks of the festival's two previous main events, although hearing time-tested songs that, over 30 years, have pushed this quintet to the forefront of their genre more than compensates.

Hjärtat Vet Vad Handen Gör opens in a march of off-kilter time signatures and sliding lead guitars — and, shockingly, is the only cut from Opeth's latest album to get busted out this evening. Instead, Mikael Åkerfeldt et al quickly plumb from the classics, plucking *Ghost Of Perdition* from 2005's *Ghost Reveries*. It's a throwback that goes down a treat. Åkerfeldt's opening roars of, *'Ghost of mother! Lingering death!'* are returned in full force by a packed tent. And, whether he's singing or growling, the frontman's pipes could be in the finest shape of his career thus far. He also brings some top-notch banter between the band's epic suites, begetting laughter with his ramblings about pig testicles and not knowing where the hell he even is.

The remainder of the setlist is an expert balancing act between Opeth's classic prog metal and the softer, more 70s-indebted quirkiness of their later career.

CHERI FAULKNER/MATT MILLS

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE: ARCTANGENT PRESS/JOE SINGH
OPETH/LEPROUS/JO QUAIL: DUNCAN EVERSON

Pig testicles to you too, Mikael! Opeth's frontman is in very fine voice.

ORGAN REFRAMED

VENUE	UNION CHAPEL, LONDON
DATE	16/09/2022

Considering its fourth iteration has been delayed for over two years, the Organ Reframed festival feels uniquely pre-ordained. Although Islington's Union Chapel regularly hosts folk, rock and prog acts – Opeth, Goblin and Wardruna having played here in past years – its centrepiece rarely gets much of an airing. Boasting over 2,000 pipes, its organ was built back in the late 19th century, specifically for the venue's spectacular scale and acoustics, and for two nights once more it's host to a range of artists, commissioned and curated by Scottish experimental organist Claire M Singer, all willing to take the instrument to new levels of brain-rewiring grandeur.

Anna von Hausswolff might be the main draw on the opening night, but hers is the second of three pieces that form a greater whole. Composer **Ipek Gorgun** is sadly absent due to cancer treatment, so her electronic score forms the backing for organist James McVinnie, who's tucked out of sight behind the stage's ornate pulpit. He's fronted by a violinist and cellist as they embark on an avant-garde journey that ranges from tentatively sparring strings through jarring, dissonant parps that sound like the human/alien signalling sequence from *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* in an extended philosophical discussion with an industrial/ambient coda. The organ is a rich yet spectral presence throughout, disassociating but immersive too, taking you deep into the realms of the unfamiliar.

In fact, every subsequent piece feels like a coda to its predecessor, subliminally acclimatising you to an out-of-body experience. **Anna von Hausswolff**'s *As Much Below As Above* features three string and brass instruments, a huge octobass setting a woozy undertow to a work of organic, gradually awakening wonder. There's always been something exultant about von Hausswolff's music, and tonight, that sensation becomes more diffuse and pervasive. The organ reaches a state of grace that's tremulous and tantric, all the instruments blaring but unified to create a vast celestial shimmer, as though Judgement Day is upon us. As its title suggests, it's both visceral and intoxicating, a near-death premonition of the ecstatic.

If Anna von Hausswolff's piece is a rite of passage, drone-ambient artist **Abul Mogard** is the aftermath. Much like Bohren & Der Club Of Gore, his music operates at a pace below the body's natural beat, dragging you into realms that feel extra-sensory. Trumpeters appear above among the chapel's intersecting arches, and the glacial pace acclimatises the listener subliminally to an out-of-body experience, all of us leaving the pews afterwards as though reacquainting ourselves with actual limbs once more.

JONATHAN SELZER

CRIPPLED BLACK PHOENIX

VENUE	THE DOME, LONDON
DATE	07/09/2022

Justin Greaves – he of luxuriant flowing hair, voluminous beard and enough ink on his arms to have once satisfied Leo Tolstoy's scribing needs – is in no doubt about tonight's agenda: "We're gonna play some new shit, some old shit and some bullshit!" One suspects he might have overstated here. In fairness to Crippled Black Phoenix's leader and sole constant member, a potential two out of three ain't bad given the chutzpah of presenting new material that won't be getting a release until a few days after the event in the form of *Banefyre*, the band's 12th studio album.

Justin Greaves: growling guitars.

Wychy ways: Belinda Kordic.

Crippled Black Phoenix: fighting fit.

What's beyond doubt is Crippled Black Phoenix's passionate following. There's an intensity burning in the eyes of those that have made it down tonight as they hang on to every word of a band that takes a frequently incredulous view of the human condition. But that's what comes with supporting the marginalised and disenfranchised, whether they have two legs or more.

Now extended to an octet, Crippled Black Phoenix's live configuration has had some time to bed in thanks to a campaign that's seen them cross Europe over the past few weeks. And while the post-Brexit headache of extended bureaucracy has proved to be a frustrating experience for the band, the chance to fine tune their modus operandi has proved beneficial.

Kicking off by swan diving deep into their past with *444* from 2009's *The Resurrectionists*, touring member Paco Fleischfresser blows up a storm on his sax to coalesce with Helen Stanley's trumpet. This is a moment of familiarity – the "old shit", if you will – before Crippled Black Phoenix bring things up to date with the "new shit", *Wyches And Bastardz*. There's intrigue to be had watching this three-guitar line-up interact: Greaves' half-chords growl and snarl, while Andy Taylor's arpeggios and chimes add colour to Joel Sagerstedt's fully formed chords. To Greaves' left stands the equally hirsute touring bassist Matt Crawford, lost in his low-end rumblings. Occasionally the addition of keyboards and the monolithic drumming of Jordi Farré threaten to overwhelm Belinda Kordic's vocals, but the moments when the entire ensemble locks in together make up for any shortcomings. *Blackout77* seamlessly blends elements of post-rock and prog with a creeping sense of menace that explodes into catharsis. Best of all is the righteous bounce of *Rise Up And Fight* as it lifts off in grand style. Elsewhere, the second half of *You Take The Devil Out Of Me* shifts into high octane gear to leave its recorded version in the rear-view mirror. And the bullshit? Not a lump to be seen or smelled.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

> **"Blackout77 seamlessly blends elements of post-rock and prog with a creeping sense of menace that explodes into catharsis."**

New shit, old shit, but no bullshit.

WILL IRELAND

Take a bow

A SUNDAY IN SEPTEMBER

VENUE	THE BEDFORD, LONDON
DATE	18/09/2022

Kicking off this all-dayer, now in its second year, Scottish sextet **Ebb** deliver a polished and impassioned set of space rock, ballads, inventive grooves and straight-up rockers. Endlessly entertaining, the band embrace variety: the atmospheric intro gives way to hard-edged riffing in seven in *Tension*, *Red Light* starts with spoken word and finishes with a weird *Take Five*-soundalike section, while unison guitar and tom phrases of *Suffering* battle with growling synths. Singer-guitarist Erin Bennett is a consistently assured and animated presence and drummer Anna Fraser dispatches thoughtful and brilliantly crafted parts. Surpassing many expectations, they set a very high bar.

Dutch combo **Downriver Dead Men Go** provide an instant contrast – their undeniably morose and downbeat style exploring far darker territory. With a vibe similar to Sigur Rós and Godspeed You! Black Emperor, theirs is a set of doom-laden textures, slow-building intensity and almost unrelenting tension. Guitarist Michel Varkevisser delivers some lovely fretboard manoeuvres, channelling Gilmour in opener *Ruins*, jangling Chris Isaac in *Walking Away* and going frenetic during the big set closer *Stone In My Heart*.

Representing possibly the nearest to classic symphonic prog on the bill and boasting both a new drummer and guitarist, **The Gift** turn in a set of fan favourites. Highlights include *The Willows*; keyboard player Gabriele Baldocci whipping out a keytar in *Tuesday's Child*; the poignant ode to loss, *The Tallest Tree*; the hard-rocking *Wild Roses* (possibly the greatest song Thin Lizzy never wrote), and their anti-war epic, *Awake And Dreaming*.

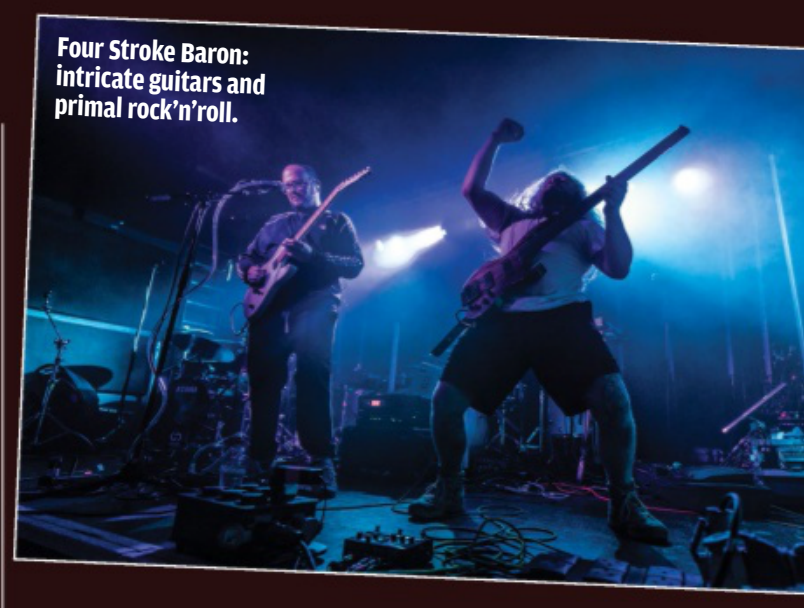
With hellhounds on their trail, **Pearl Handled Revolver** take The Bedford back to the late 60s with their sludgy proto-metal and psychedelic blues. Taking cues from The Doors, Can and early Sabbath, it's a heady and mesmerising recipe. Keyboard player, Simon Rinaldo not only delivers the requisite thick organ and electric piano flavours, but also all the bass parts simultaneously with his left hand or bass pedals! There's lots of appreciative head nodding to the cool grooves of new song *Gilding The Lily* and epic brain-melter *Help Me Down From The Trees*.

Headliners, Dutch art-rockers **Lesoir** provide another textural shift. Openers *Single-Eyed* and *Mosaic* deliver lush soundscapes and an easy, lyrical flow punctuated by powerful moments with Maartje Meessen interjecting flute into her stirring vocal performance. There's quite a bit of instrument swapping and a rare appearance from a pedal steel guitar. Twenty-minute epic *Babel* is a clear highlight with its multipart structure and monumental end section. A thunderously well-received set.

GARY MACKENZIE

VOLA

VENUE	THE GARAGE, LONDON
DATE	29/02/2022
SUPPORT	VOYAGER, FOUR STROKE BARON


Four Stroke Baron: intricate guitars and primal rock'n'roll.

Prog is a universal language, and it's hard to think of a recent line-up that demonstrates it more clearly than tonight's. North London's 600-capacity rock club The Garage is being graced by a trio of bands that hail from the US, Australia and Denmark respectively. That's three different continents uniting under one roof in the name of forward-thinking music.

Representing the States are opening act **Four Stroke Baron**. Despite jerking the curtain, they already have serious prog rock pedigree: 2021 album *Classics* was mixed by Devin Townsend and 2018's *Planet Silver Screen* featured Shining leader Jørgen Munkeby on saxophone. The Townsend connection is especially obvious when the trio take the stage: opener *Friday Knight* heralds a near-operatic vocal turn from singer-guitarist Kirk Witt. Framing his voice is a mixture of intricate guitar work and primal rock'n'roll. It's a blend that makes the band both experimental and invigorating, and the audience lose themselves in some good old-fashioned headbanging.

> **"The full diversity, power and geography of progressive metal's been flaunted."**

It's perfect timing for The Garage to start getting limber, since **Voyager** are going to demand almost an hour of movement from the still-filling venue. The Perth-based quintet are natural showpeople that demand nothing less than full investment. Guitarists Simone Dow and Scott Kay have especially flawless chemistry, jumping in sync at the drop of every beat and, naturally, encouraging the same from their onlookers. They take nothing away from frontman Daniel Estrin and bassist/backing singer Alex Canion, though: their interweaving vocals are the backbone of such prog metal singalongs as *Hyperventilating*. Estrin steals even more points in the midst of set-closer *Ascension*, during which he picks up one of Voyager's LED light tubes and swings it about like a lightsaber.

Prog and power metal are the most plentiful ingredients in Voyager's anthems, but the Australians make no bones about maintaining their recent Europop tangent either. They've unabashedly pursued the Eurovision crowd since their 2019 album *Colours In The Sun* by upping their synths and electronic ambience to nonsense levels. Although it's been a controversial swerve, new songs *Colours* and *Brightstar* slot flawlessly into the setlist — and you can't argue with the flashy outfits complementing the gimmick. More white leather and white jeans in heavy prog music, please!

There are no such frills from **VOLA**, though. These Danes (and Swede) are a wholehearted prog metal force. The sound of *24 Light-Years* heralds the four-piece's arrival, gracing The Garage with the sound of last year's *Witness* LP. That third album is by far the band's most out-there, and they present that eclecticism — warts and all — to their late-night congregation. So, while the aforementioned opening track serenades London with VOLA's tried and tested USPs — polyrhythmic drumming, hellishly low djent licks and shimmering falsetto singing — *These Black Claws* has a rapping bridge blast out from the backing track. It's certainly left-field but doesn't always work.

KEVIN NIXON

Voyager: kings and queen of prog singalongs!

Voyager's Danny Estrin perfects the keytar and white leather look.

However, that's the sole blemish on an otherwise spotless set. *Stray The Skies*, from 2016 debut *Inmazes*, pops up surprisingly early and ignites the crowd to the point of a moshpit. That said, based on how pummelling those Meshuggah-worshipping guitars are, who can blame them? At least respite comes from that soaring and keyboard-backed refrain.

Visually, VOLA aren't the kind of flamboyant rabble-rousers that can rival Voyager, although they compensate with a dazzling LED show: the colours twitch and expand in time with every riff and snare strike. It's a different breed of showmanship to that which preceded it, although that's not a problem, since this London crowd clearly needs no encouragement to go apeshit. By the night's end, the full diversity, power and geography of progressive metal's been flaunted.

MATT MILLS

VOLA's Asger Mygind indulges in some Meshuggah worship.

VOLA: dazzling lights, astounding sounds!

THE OCEAN

VENUE	229, LONDON
DATE	26/08/2022
SUPPORT	PLAYGROUNDED, LLNN

Of all the bands who've had to arrange and rearrange tours over the last couple of years, few have been fucked over more than The Ocean. The international prog metal collective were meant to grace our shores in January 2021, promoting *Phanerozoic II: Mesozoic | Cenozoic* with support from PG.lost, Hypno5e and Svalbard. Then they had to postpone their dates to the summer. Then they had to push them back *again*. That they've finally made it to the UK – now flanked by acts from guitarist Robin Staps' Pelagic Records – feels nothing short of miraculous.

Greek/Dutch quintet **Playgrounded** commence the evening with their bleak progressive rock. Well, tonight they're a quartet: travel troubles have caused drummer Giorgos Pouliasis to miss the gig and get replaced by a laptop. Pouliasis and bassist Odysseas Zafeiriou are this bunch's driving force, their wonky rhythm work often being the only music played beneath twin-vocalist melodies. Although Playgrounded perform well given the circumstances, there's clearly a chest-rumbling oomph missing from their 40 minutes.

After **LLNN** pummel 229 into powder with their powerful post-metal, **The Ocean** – despite their members hailing from Germany and Switzerland – seize the stage to the kind of rapturous response usually reserved for homecomings. The smoke machines work tirelessly from the second the intro tape starts, reducing the six-piece to silhouettes in fog. It's a smokescreen that lets their light show steal the entire night, each flash bursting brightly through the white. The visual splendour is at its best during *Jurassic/Cretaceous*. During the 13-minute behemoth, each stabbing guitar chord gets paired with a blink-and-you'll-miss-it flare. The end result is like watching musicians play through a zoetrope.

The band almost sound as good as they look. From opener *Triassic* onwards, the setlist is progressive metal perfection, with behemoth *Silurian: Age Of Sea Scorpions* employing post-rock crescendos to curate hugely cathartic payoffs. *Bathyalpelagic I* and *II* demonstrate not only The Ocean's melodic sensibilities, but also their most conceptual songwriting to date, lifted from a record themed around diving deeper and deeper into the sea. The apex, though, is *Permian: The Great Dying. The Phanerozoic I* finale proves its status as a fan favourite, with Loïc Rosetti's croons and roars getting returned at full force by a rabid crowd.

Speaking of Rossetti, the frontman is on a tear tonight. He's charismatic and, vocally, can do it all. It's just a shame that he's insultingly low in the mix. It's the one chink in the armour of what's otherwise been one of prog's finest gigs this year.

MATT MILLS

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PRESS

HANS RUTTEN (THE GATHERING)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon**

Where's home?
I live where I was born – Nijmegen [The Netherlands], which is near the German border.

Earliest prog memory?
I saw a video clip of Rush around the *Power Windows* period, I was something like 16 years old, and they were great. I borrowed *Caress Of Steel* from the local library, then went through their catalogue from there.

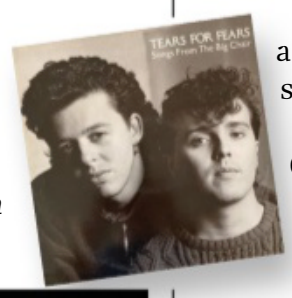
The first prog album you bought?
Voivod's *Dimension Hatröss* [1988]. I was always into metal, but the progressive side of metal, and Voivod are incredible.

And the latest?
The Snow Goose by Camel! I found a second-hand vinyl copy so I bought it. It's a very important album, a good one to have on vinyl.

Your first prog concert?
Pink Floyd on their Momentary Lapse Of Reason Tour, here in Nijmegen [July 10, 1989]. We all smoked a lot of weed, then there was a Spitfire coming overhead, burning beds and a big inflatable pig! It was quite surreal, but really, really beautiful.

And the most recent?
Fish, again in Nijmegen, just before corona. He's older, but he's still in such great shape.

What's your newest prog discovery?
Tears for Fears, especially the first two albums, *The Hurting* and *Songs From The Big Chair*, which is a classic. Those guys have such good chemistry.



Guilty musical pleasure?
Nowadays everybody hates Coldplay, but the first two albums [*Parachutes* and *A Rush Of Blood To The Head*] are really great. I like to listen to them on a Sunday morning.

What's your specialist subject on *Mastermind*?
I know a lot about NASA's Apollo programme. I was born in June 1969, a month before Apollo 11 landed on the Moon.

Apollo 11's lunar module pilot Buzz Aldrin takes small steps in July '69.

NASA/NEWSMAKERS/GETTY IMAGES

Your favourite venue?
The Boerderij here in the Netherlands. The owner is very nice and always books us. The technicians are very good as well, we always have a good sound there, and they cook very, very well!

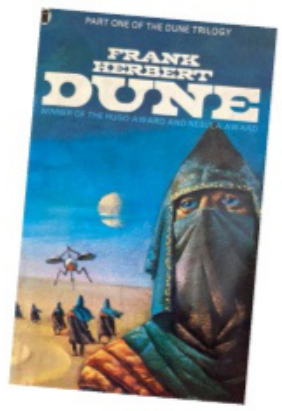
What do you do outside of music?
I work part-time as a care nurse, helping elderly people with dementia and Parkinson's disease, things like that.

> Tears For Fears are my newest discovery. They have such good chemistry.

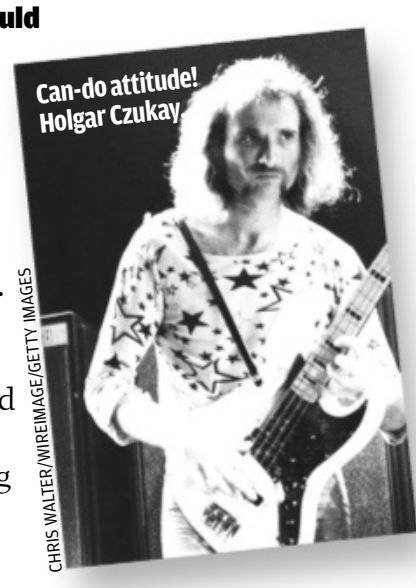
Who's your prog hero?
As a drummer, Neil Peart. But also Voivod's late guitarist, Denis 'Piggy' D'Amour – he was great.

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Probably Rush's *La Villa Strangiato*, or the whole of *Hemispheres*.

Recommend us a good proggy read.
I like the science fiction side of prog, and I'm currently reading Frank Herbert's *Dune* for the first time. It's from the 60s but it's still very fresh. It's very well written.



Prog muso would you love to work with?
I'd love to have worked with [the late] Holger Czukay [Can]. Or maybe the Kraftwerk guys. They did something new, throwing out all the instruments and buying computers...



CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

The prog album that always gets you in a good mood?
Marillion's *Seasons End*. I really love to listen to that when I'm driving.

Favourite album cover?
Iron Maiden's *Powerslave*, but if that's not prog enough then Rush's *Permanent Waves* cover, with the girl in the skirt.

And what are you up to at the moment?
Our album *Beautiful Distortion* and EP *Interference* are out now. We're trying to set up our European tour for next year, but it's difficult – tour buses are bloody expensive now. And we want to play the UK, but you guys stepped out of Europe so it's hard, but we want to come!

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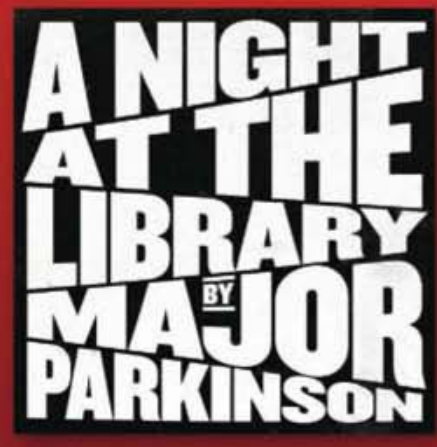
MAJOR PARKINSON
Valesa - Chapter I: Velvet Prison

Weaving between nostalgia and failed revolutions, this album is a completely unique star in the soundtrack of 2022, offering you something that has rarely been done in any field of music.

The ever-evolving seven-piece has emerged from the primordial darkness of 2017's Blackbox, into a neon haze of progressive synthpop/rock.

UK GIGS
14/10 - Summer's End Festival, Chepstow
15/10 - Boston Music Room, London



ALSO OUT

MAJOR PARKINSON
A Night At The Library

NEW RELEASES FROM APOLLON RECORDS

HONEYVEIN
Honeyvein
(Multi-instrumentalist Bastian Veland from Dobbeltgjenger, ex-Ossicles solo project)

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Part 2 - Unveiled by fire

ANDERS BUUAS
The Edinburgh Suite

GEBHARDT
Geb Heart
(Håkon Geb - ex-Motorpsycho drummer)

FRIENDSHIP
Alchemist of your Destiny

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